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MAUD ATHERTON,

BY

ALFRED LEIGH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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MAUD ATHERTON.

CHAPTER I.

“Not a May-game is this man’s life; but a battle and a march—a warfare with principalities and powers. No idle promenade through fragrant orange groves and green flowery spaces, waited on by the choral Muses and the rosy Hours: it is a stern pilgrimage through burning sandy solitudes—through regions of thick ribbed ice.”

Carlyle.

(Past and Present.)

ARTHUR had not promised to adopt little Nellie Yempson on the impulse of the moment, but had been actuated by many motives that had steadily taken possession of his mind. “My work for the next three years shall not be utterly fruitless,” he thought, “if my writings prove useless and all my public endeavours fail,

I shall at least have accomplished something if I save one child for a life of hopeful womanhood from one of hungry poverty and almost inevitable shame."

This had been his first thought when he had promised the dying girl that her child should not be left friendless to fight the world alone; but apart from this motive, he had felt a kind of fantastic fondness for the child ever since she had spoken to him on Westminster Bridge, and the thought that she might live to find existence as dreary a thing as her mother had done, was unspeakably painful to him.

"Her mother's short life was heavy with wrong and misery," he said to himself, "I will save you, little Raven, from such a fate."

What to do with the child had at first been rather problematical to him. He had left his apartments at Norwood, (where the mysterious housekeeper, Mrs. Blinkum, had astonished him by fainting tragically away at the announcement

of his intended departure) and had taken less expensive rooms near town. He could not take the child there, for he had no room for her, and would have found it rather difficult to know what to do with her if he had. At this stage of his reflections he had thought of Sarah, Maud Atherton's breathless and devoted nurse, and had at once decided to put the Raven under her charge.

When Ralph Atherton died, Sarah had come to live at Kensington with her daughter, a widow who had a large house and let furnished lodgings.

So Arthur called a cab and drove to Kensington, while Nellie Yempson tired out with excitement and crying fell fast asleep in his arms.

Sarah received the commission with delight, though she protested against the liberality of the terms which Arthur proposed. Her figure had ceased to be slender, and asthma is not commonly associated with sentiment, but a woman does not easily lose her admiration for men who are young

and handsome, with winning manners and a generous hand, and she had conceived a reverential admiration for Arthur on her own account. But when she felt, in addition to this, that Maud loved him, there was no service she would not have gladly rendered him, no sacrifice she would not have made for his sake.

For Maud was her idol, her darling, in her estimation the most beautiful, fascinating and wonderful young lady in the world. She had been in the service of old Sir James Atherton, and had gone to the house of 'Master Ralph' when he married Beatrice Genari. She had taken Maud a helpless infant in her arms, and vowed that whatever else was wanting, the child should not lack a mother's love.

And she had kept her word. As Maud passed through the successive stages of babyhood, childhood, girlhood, and the first fair spring of womanhood, she had never wavered in her devotion. Fault finding was a luxury she occasionally

indulged in, holding that it was beneficial as a system of culture, but Maud at a very early age in her history discovered that this sternness was an imposition and treated it as a subtle and exquisite joke, whereat Sarah would grumble and try to be severe, but finding it impossible would join in Maud's musical laughter, gently stroking the child's beautiful hair with her large rough hands, and regarding her with love and pride that would not be disguised.

Arthur knew all this, and had no hesitation in placing Nellie Yempson under her charge. He told Sarah the child's story, and made liberal arrangements for her board and lodging as well as for the purchase of a new supply of clothes.

“At present my little Raven's plumage is rather extraordinary,” he said laughing, “you must moult birdie and have a new crop of feathers before my next visit.”

The child who perfectly understood his meaning expressed her approbation of this arrangement

by a subdued laugh of enjoyment, the first she had given since her mother died.

“ I shall make arrangements for a governess coming here for an hour or so a day,” said Arthur, “ but I don’t want Nellie to be worked hard yet awhile. The lessons you have to learn Raven,” he said, turning once more to the child, “ are to be very obedient and very happy. You’ll have to enlarge your views on the subject of cleanliness, and conform to the social prejudice which demands that ladies’ hair should be frequently combed ; but these restrictions are not very terrible. Now I must go. Good bye, Nellie.”

The child clung to him with her arms round his neck sobbing violently. She had come to consider him in her childish way as a kind of magician who could do anything, and was as gentle and good as he was powerful ; therefore to lose sight of him was like losing daylight for ever. But he pacified her by caresses and promises to return soon, then after shaking hands with

Sarah and her daughter, Mrs. Collop, was leaving the house.

But just as he was going, his attention was arrested by the sound of music.

A clear soprano voice of great power and sweetness was singing an air from one of Mozart's Masses; Arthur's quick musical ear detected in a moment not only that the voice was a remarkable one, but also that it had received no ordinary care or culture.

"Who was that singing?" he asked, when the sweet sounds had died away.

"That was Miss Edith Ashford, sir," said Mrs. Collop, "she is a young actress as was trained very careful. She only begun to sing and act in public a month or two ago, but she do sing beautiful to be sure."

"She does, indeed," said Arthur. "Unless my countrymen are more long-eared, (and dull-eared too,) than I think them, she will be a famous artiste before many months are past."

He lingered a little while by the gate in the hope of hearing the sweet voice again, but finding all was silent walked briskly home, for time was precious and much work lay before him.

In the careless expenditure of the last two or three years he had incurred some rather heavy debts; these he had within the last day or two paid off, and had (with the exception of five hundred pounds which he set apart for Nellie Yempson) absolutely nothing in the world.

So he set to work in downright earnest, not merely at his high social schemes but also for the necessities of daily life.

He worked from early morning till far into the night, with an earnestness and passion of which only youth and strength inspired by high aims are capable.

He toiled for bread; by translating books, by compiling works of various kinds, by light contributions to magazines, and by sketches in pencil, pen and ink, and water colours.

He worked thus for money and worked hard, for he had determined never to touch one penny of Maud's fortune, and he strained every nerve to enable him to offer her a home worthy of her.

But he did not for a moment forget the higher aims he had put before him. Together with a few literary acquaintances he started a new publication. Of this he took the editorship, and in it he wrote his most cherished convictions and most earnest thoughts.

The "London Review" identified itself with no party. It came into the world without the aid of celebrated names to give its voice authority—by far the greater part of it Arthur wrote himself and the remaining contributions were from authors almost as obscure as he, yet in a month or two from the publication of the first number it came to be recognised as one of the leading reviews of the time.

It was not merely because its articles were brilliant and powerful, bearing unmistakable

signs of a mind at once original and scholarly—these characteristics contributed much to its success, but alone they would never have raised it to the position which it so speedily attained. It was because on all matters it reviewed, its tone was fearless, just and impartial.

On literature, art, politics and history, the articles written by Arthur touched with a fairness as unusual as its fearlessness was startling. The “Review” connived at no wrong and sanctioned no abuses; but its denunciation was without calumny, its satire never became invective. Of course it was abused by the lowest among its contemporaries, and Arthur Calverley was denounced as an immovable tory and a dangerous radical—a corrupt aristocrat and a mischievous demagogue; but to these conflicting verdicts he replied nothing and cared as little.

By periodicals of a higher class his bold and original views on topics of the day were freely criticised and sometimes stringently condemned;

but to such attacks he gave forcible replies, and gained from his staunchest opponent the reputation of chivalrous courtesy in the tournament of literary controversy.

And amidst all this work he never lost sight of his great aim—the amelioration of the condition of the poor. It was no class warfare he had undertaken, he was as conscious of the criminal vices of many of the men and women for whom he meant to plead as the country squire who yearns to hang a hungry man for poaching. “These people are improvident and ignorant—many of them are idle, many of them are absolutely vicious, but they are intensely miserable—they are propagating disease and crime to be heavy curses upon us and our children. Let us help them—for their own sakes and for the sake of society—let us take something from their misery, in the name of God.” This thought was ever in his mind.

So day after day he went into the poorest courts

and most squalid alleys of London. Soon he came to be well known, and it was whispered by the desperate characters among whom he passed, that he did not know what fear meant.

Once he was attacked, but the burly ruffian who struck him, found to his astonishment that this white handed gentleman could hit out from the shoulder as well as a prize fighter in good training. One well directed blow felled the man to the ground, his two companions were hesitating whether to run the risk of being treated in like fashion or not, when Arthur said coolly—

“Get me some clean rags as quickly as you can, the man has cut his head open against the kerb stone, and I must bind it up.”

The two men gazed at him in utter bewilderment. If he had run away they would have given chase, if he had attacked them they could have resisted, but that he should first knock a man down, and then bind his head up was altogether unaccountable.

“What are you waiting for?” asked Arthur as coolly as if they had been professed hospital nurses. “Don’t you see the man’s head is bleeding?”

The men were no match for such calm decision of character. They slunk off sheepishly and brought him the linen. With this he bound up the wound which was not of a serious nature, and having given him some brandy from a pocket flask he always carried, had the satisfaction of seeing his late antagonist perfectly restored.

“Let me advise you,” he said to the discomfited garotter, “not to attack me again, lest you should fare worse than you have done this evening. Good night.” And with that he walked leisurely away.

Next day he was in the same neighbourhood as fearlessly as though further attack were impossible.

He had not miscalculated the people. Partly from fear and partly from admiration of his

courage they never molested him again. Perhaps too, for the instincts of the poor are generally true, it was because the dullest and worst of them began to recognise that he came among them as a friend, a powerful one who must not be repulsed.

This was what he had strived and longed for. He could come among them now without suspicion, he could collect facts and information concerning their lives without being thought a spy. He talked to them freely and won their confidence in return; what little money he had to spare he gave them, but his influence was gained less by that than by his ready sympathy, his quick perceptions of what advice would be useful and when it might be safely given, and the fearlessness with which he entered pestilential haunts, and stood by beds of virulent disease.

And so day followed day, and week succeeded week, till six months had elapsed since his parting from Maud. Six months of hard work, of

loneliness and separation, but also of successful effort and accomplished duty.

“ Six months nearer to the time when I shall see her again,” he said hopefully as he laid down his pen after a long night’s work. “ She will be nineteen in a month or two. Make the most of your time Horace Arvale, for it is flying fast.”

CHAPTER II.

“ For all is bright, and beauteous, and clear,
And the meanest thing most precious and dear
When the magic of love is present.
Love, that lends a sweetness and grace
To the humblest spot and the plainest face—
That turns Wilderness Row into Paradise Place,
And Garlic Hill to Mount Pleasant.”

Tom Hood.

AND Maud—how had the six months passed with her? While Arthur was working and crushing down the thought of his own loneliness, as he more fully recognised the deeper misery of others, how did she bear their long separation?

Hers was perhaps the harder part, for the

scenes in which her life-drama had fallen were not very congenial to her. She missed the old freedom from restraint, the old rambles among the hills, the uninterrupted readings in her natural studio by the little river Elva, the simple-hearted villagers and their grateful affection. Most of all the old faces she missed her father, and longed with the passionate yearning which only death, or the living death of hopeless estrangement, can awaken to see his face and hear his voice again.

And then she would think of Arthur with a love deeper yet, and with all her light-hearted nature, hopeful thoughts, and brave determination, the time of banishment seemed so long and dreary that her courage almost failed.

“That idiotic old grandfather of mine,” she would say, scarcely knowing whether to laugh or cry, “why couldn’t he have left his money to some one who wanted it? Or if he was determined to do something absurd, why didn’t he endow a

society for supplying crossing sweepers with champagne, or found a college for the instruction of paupers in the violin, or make arrangements for the gratuitous instruction in dancing of all old ladies over ninety? That would have been an interesting proceeding, especially if he had supplemented the last bequest by a special grant for the purchase of skipping ropes for pupils under ninety-five. He might have done any of these things, and he would at least have bequeathed a joke to posterity; but why in the world did he leave his money to me?"

But as the ghost of Sir James Atherton did not rise and make reply in hollow tones, and as anybody else's opinion on the subject would have been unsatisfactory, Maud was obliged to bear her fortune, or misfortune as she considered it, with as much fortitude as possible.

Her position in the house soon became a clearly defined one. Mrs. Arvale had at first tried to make her as submissive as her own daughter had

become. But here she failed utterly. Blanche had always been afraid of her mother; Maud was not in the least so, but waged such desperate warfare, by quiet mischief and by sarcasm, that with all its good humour was keenly pointed, that Mrs. Arvale had been compelled to capitulate and let Maud have her own way unmolested, taking refuge in doubt concerning Maud's fitness for London society and the prospects of her eternal salvation.

By everyone else in the house she was admired and loved almost as much as by the Elverley villagers. The slowest servant in the house became nimble in her service, and it was whispered in the servants' hall that the two languid footmen intended fighting on the first convenient occasion, to decide who should have the honour of opening the street door for her in future.

Of Blanche Arvale she had grown very fond, though their characters were widely different.

Maud had been called inconsistent, and so indeed she was, but therein lay the primal charm of her mind. Her love of laughter was so intense that she had been called frivolous, her passionate worship for the beautiful in nature had laid her open to the charge of mad enthusiasm ; her perception of what was hollow and false, was so keen that she had been called cold and indifferent, her woman's heart was so rich in love and sympathy that she had been considered sentimental. The real truth is best expressed by a paradox, she was none of these things because she was all of them. Her nature consisted of opposite characteristics, which balanced and qualified each other.

With Blanche on the other hand it was widely different, in her the emotional elements of character had been cultivated at the expense of the sterner ones. She had permitted her life to be guided by impulse so long, that her thoughts had become the mere servants to her feelings, and all her views were shaped accordingly. She was

intensely affectionate and regarded Maud with an admiration—half love, half worship, so deep that Maud acquired an influence over her that might have been absolutely despotic.

Except in the instance of forbidding Arthur Calverley the house, Horace Arvale never attempted to check Maud's inclinations in any way whatever. So lightly did he hold the authority of guardian that she used to wonder greatly at his decisive use of it on that occasion, but the problem defied solution, and she was always obliged to give it up in despair.

He grew more moody and abstracted every day she thought, and she noticed that he drank port at dinner more freely as the months rolled on. But he would watch her face as closely as Arthur could have done, and when she played or sang he was never weary of listening. Once when they were alone together in the drawing-room, and she had been singing Italian songs, he told her the story of his friendship with Ralph Atherton—

how they had both loved Beatrice Genari—how Ralph had won her, and he had buried his secret until now.

He had never forgotten his first and only love, that was clear, and Maud had felt gently towards him ever since he confided in her. She knew that she was dear to him for her mother's sake, but much as she thought about him, she could not understand his character. His manner was always strange, but with her it was more difficult to comprehend than with others. It was not the strange love he bore her, but an undefined blending of fear and remorse. What could it mean? Again and again she asked herself the question, only to be baffled in the search for an answer.

One night, rather more than six months after her parting with Arthur, Maud was sitting in her bedroom when she heard a soft rap at the door, and Blanche Arvale's voice calling for admission.

“Come in,” said Maud, and Blanche who had

just returned from a dinner party, with her father, came in and sat down by her side.

“ Well, Blanche, you look as though dinner parties were as refreshing as cold baths, instead of being the dullest—”

“ Don’t rail at dinner parties, Maud, you are no sufferer from them.”

“ No, I shudder to think how dull I should become if I went through a course of them. I believe I suffered mentally for weeks from that last dinner party your father gave, I was taken down to dinner by a ponderous man with enormous boots, and a tread like an elephant’s, for the first half-hour he was voracious and speechless, during the second and third he made no remark except upon the weather, and the rest of the time he tried to talk—heaven save the mark—poetry.”

Blanche laughed. “ You are like *la belle dame sans merci*,” she said.

“ Sans merci,” repeated Maud, “ he had no

mercy upon me. I told him I thought the three greatest English poets were Hayley, Martin Tupper, and Dr. Watts, and he answered without the faintest inclination to laugh, that he thought so too."

"I'm afraid I can't defend your elephantine friend," answered Blanche, "but you would have liked the conversation better to-night."

"What was it about?" was the indifferent enquiry, for Maud was rather an infidel on the subject of Horace Arvale's friends and their powers of conversation.

"They talked of hardly anything but the last number of the 'London Review,' have you seen it?"

"Seen it," said Maud proudly, her bright eyes flashing with triumph, "I have been reading it all the evening."

"And crying over it too dear, haven't you?"

"Don't be satirical Blanche," said Maud laughing, "either fail to observe anything unusual

about my eyes, or ascribe it to weariness and the heat of the night."

"That's all very well," returned Blanche, "but you have been crying, there are tears in your eyes now. Is anything the matter darling?"

"What a loving little puss it is," said Maud, putting her arm caressingly round Blanche's waist, and really it was a very precious little waist for such a purpose, "there is nothing whatever wrong. I have been happier to-night than I have ever been since my father died. What did they say about the 'Review' at your dinner party?"

"Oh, they said a great deal I can't remember, you know I'm not clever like you are. By the way," said Blanche, suddenly breaking off, "I thought clever women were always dreadfully plain—I believe you know everything, and yet you are the loveliest girl I ever saw, I don't wonder men fall in love with you. There was that handsome young barrister, Mr. D'Arcy—"

"Bother Mr. D'Arcy," interrupted Maud,

stamping one of her little bare feet rather impatiently on the ground. "You wicked little torturer, why don't you tell me what they said?"

"Oh, they said Mr. Calverley's article upon 'the present condition of the poor, and the obligation of the classes of society to each other;' that's right isn't it Maud? It's a fearful mouthful to utter all at once."

"That's right," said Maud, resignedly, "but do postpone your incidental reflections till you've finished your story."

"Well," resumed Blanche, "they said it had made a great stir in the City, that it had been talked of in all the clubs—that it showed a remarkable knowledge of the subject, that it was a pity Mr. Calverley was not in parliament, and all that kind of thing. Are you contented now?"

Maud was silent for a few moments, then she answered—

"It is the first of a series of articles to be written on the great social questions of the day.

I know very little about them—nothing but what I have learnt from books—but I *do* know that it is splendidly written, as only a true man could write; that its tone is earnest, statesmanly, and impartial; and that he must have almost lived among those poor miserable people for the last six months to know so much about them.”

“Is that why those long eyelashes of yours were wet, dear?”

“When we parted he said to me, ‘if ever you find in my writings a thought, a belief or a fancy that you think noble, true or beautiful, the authorship is yours not mine . . . and whatever poor laurels I may win I will bring them all to the feet of my Faerie Queene.’ And when I see how he is working in the world do you wonder that my eyes grow wet, with joy at his triumph, pride that I can move him so, and sorrow that I am not the heroine he thinks *me*?”

Blanche did *not* wonder either at this or at the fact of Arthur’s whole life being influenced and

inspired by love like this. She made no reply, but holding Maud's hand in hers, played with the diamond ring upon her finger as though she were hesitating on the brink of confidence.

Occupied as her thoughts were, Maud noticed this, and said with a smile—

“What is it Blanche? You have something to tell me about yourself, I know. Was Mr. Ernest Cradley at the dinner party to-night?”

Blanche Arvale tried to look unconcerned, but as her neck and cheeks had a rosy glow upon them telling a different tale, the attempt was a failure.

“Do you know, Blanche,” resumed Maud, “it strikes me, and not for the first time, that you take a new and wonderful interest in drawing. Your indifference on the subject of art six months' ago was something terrible, I'd tell you that it cost me many sleepless nights and tearful days, if I thought there was any chance of your believing me. But now you can be enthusiastic on

the subject of a waterfall at five minutes' notice, and eloquent upon the subject of a forest in rather less. The reflective mind naturally yearns for a solution of the problem. Shall I go on?"

"Yes, please Maud," the answer was very softly spoken, but Maud heard it and resumed—

"About four months ago you began to take lessons in drawing. Now a drawing-master is generally a being of mysterious nature. He has all the artist's vagrancy, without the halo of poetry, society has flung (in lieu of a great coat which would cost money) around artistic genius. He is generally aged, absent-minded and bald, carries stale crumbs in his pocket, and addresses you either as Miss or Mum. This is the kind of instructor I should have engaged for the tuition of so susceptible a maiden as Miss Blanche Arvale, but Fate or the Powers of mischief, or my guardian in one of his abstracted moods, brought her Mr. Ernest Cradley, who is——

"Stay, Maud, I'll describe him to you if you'll

only be serious, I'm afraid to trust his portrait to you."

"I'm serious as the jokes at a dinner party," said Maud, "and I defy you to find anything less suggestive of laughter than they. Give me his portrait and you shall have my criticism thereon."

"He is young and handsome."

"That is undeniable."

"He is of an old family, better even than my own."

"Quite true."

"He is a perfect gentleman in the true sense of the word, and is worth a thousand of the ordinary men one meets in society."

"Yes, and moreover——"

"I love him with all my heart, Maud, and I think he loves me."

"I have only one objection to your sketch, Blanchie, and that is that I knew it all before, I won't tease you any more dear, for he really is

a fine fellow, and I hope you will be very happy. Did he tell you he loved you to-night."

"Yes, there was a young lady who played after dinner an instrumental piece that lasted three-quarters of an hour. She played very badly, (I have grown critical since I have heard you Maud) but I never enjoyed music so much in my life, not even yours, for Ernest and I were looking over some engravings together, and then he told me everything."

Maud spoke the words of congratulation and hope for which Blanche was longing, and after a little desultory conversation she said—

"And now what are the difficulties, for I can see by your eyes that Lysander's dirge over the uneven course of true love applies to your case. What is the obstacle now, Blanche?"

"He is very poor, and mamma wants me to marry a frightful old stockbroker by the name of Scrump."

Maud hummed a few bars of 'And ye shall walk in silk attire.'

“Be faithful to Donald,” she said, “though all London laughed at you. I think life would be delightful if it were not for money and bores. I wish Mr. Cradley had my fortune, it would be of some use to him and it’s of none to me; but if you are not afraid of poverty you may defy Mr. Scrump and all connected with him. By the way, what a horrible name—fancy my thinking of you as Mrs. Scrump. I shudder at the bare idea.”

The church clocks struck three, and Maud rose from her chair.

“Good night, darling,” she said to Blanche, “don’t fear the future. If I can help you in any way I will; and remember that love has conquered more obstacles than this, and will again.”

CHAPTER III.

Her face is like the echo to a thought
That long has haunted me.

THE first of Arthur's three years of banishment had passed away, and he was sitting in his little room in Fleet Street, one evening, thinking of all that had happened since Maud bound her gold necklace round his wrist.

He had never seen her since then, but the thought of her had been with him always, ever inspiring him to fresh effort and renewed exertion. When he was physically or mentally weary, when those for whom he worked were ungrateful, when

his motives were publicly aspersed, or his character privately calumniated, the remembrance of Maud Atherton was enough to sustain him, her love and trust nerved him under any labour, defeat or care.

His former acquaintances marvelled greatly at his new mode of life. His old susceptibility to boredom, his desultory trifling with everyday affairs, and his rapidly growing cynicism had quite blinded them to the latent strength and energy of his character. They had always considered him clever, and would have highly approved of the comedy he once wrote and afterwards destroyed, but that he—the son of an old Tory Squire, should risk his life in the foulest haunts of London, was an idea incompatible with a belief in his sanity.

“ Weally, you know,” said Lord Gruffin to a confidential friend, who like himself suffered from chronic fatigue, ‘ it’s a kind of tweason for Calverley to forsake his pwoper wank in society,

and mix among snobs in this fashion. Fancy an awfully clevar fellah like Calverley, whom all the girls went mad about talking to women who dwop their h's. One fellah—very well informed man too—told me the places he goes to are howwibly dirty. It makes me ill to think of it.”

And exhausted by a speech of such unusual length, Lord Gruffin, assisted by his friend, relapsed into a condition of speechless horror.

And so the days and months passed by. Arthur's name had become widely known and respected, and the ‘London Review’ had ceased to be regarded with suspicion. The year had not made him rich in money, but it had in other things.

The triumph with which one watches the slow fulfilment of a great purpose, the knowledge of usefulness—the consciousness of earnest work and self denial, the remembrance of well won gratitude and affection, often from natures called harsh and morose, the memory that dying lips

had breathed his name to heaven, all this a single year had brought him.

Little Nellie Yempson had so much improved during the same time that few would have recognised the quick, clever little girl, with laughing eyes and long fair hair, for the quaint child who had called Abel Alley home, and believed in the sign-board of the 'Foreign Prince' as an achievement of artistic genius. Arthur often called at the house in Kensington, and sometimes he would take her to his little room in Fleet Street, where she would make the place ring with the sound of her childish laughter and delight, for these were Arthur's holidays too, and he would play as though he were a child himself, or tell her stories—a way of passing the time she especially loved.

It was after she had been spending an hour with him in this manner, and Sarah had just taken her home, that Arthur sat by the fire thinking of Maud's bright eyes, and wondering

whether London life had changed her in any way, when his reverie was disturbed by a young man who entered the room and unceremoniously threw himself into a chair.

He was a strange looking young fellow about Arthur's own age, with an indescribable air of having run to seed, occasioned principally by the untidiness of his dress and the length of his hair, both of which were unpleasantly suggestive of dust. His nose, mouth, and chin appeared to have been taken from three faces utterly unlike each other; but his face was saved from ugliness by its dark expressive eyes, which, when they were not screwed up in laughter, seemed strangely out of harmony with his other features.

This gentleman having seated himself comfortably, intimated his presence by observing thoughtfully to the piano—

“Calverley alone in deep thought. Enter a murderer.”

“Of nothing deeper than a pleasant reverie,”

said Arthur, jumping up from his seat with a smile, partly of pleasure and partly of amusement at the sight of the uncouth figure, "I am lazy to-night, as you see."

"As I was rejoiced to see," rejoined the other, "considering that every time I have been before, you have been working as though life depended on it. I determined to have a terrible revenge, and one night—or rather one morning—I came at two o'clock, chuckling at the thought of disturbing your slumbers; but no, I found you writing furiously—wide awake, and so fresh that I made an excuse and went home directly. Do you ever sleep at all?"

"Now and then," said Arthur, laughing, "but I rarely leave off working before two or three in the morning. I never can write in the day-time, can you, Charlie?"

"Oh, I'm a very erratic dog," was the reply. "I generally write madly for six weeks, and then renounce pen and ink for as many months; but

you are a better man than I, Arthur. Your last article in the 'Review' is perfection. I never feel half so ashamed of myself as when I think of you; but I glory in your success old boy as much—I was going to say as the girl who loves you, whoever she may be—but next to her at all events."

There was an expression of affection and pride in his fine eyes, as he looked at Arthur's face that vouched for his sincerity.

"I wish all my critics were as lenient as Charlie Alcester," said Arthur cordially, "but I'm afraid some of them are juster. However it is you who should be congratulated seeing that all London is ringing with the success of your tragedy."

"What have all our common friends said about it?" enquired Charlie Alcester quickly.

"They are all immensely astonished, and declare that organ grinding or hornpipe dancing was more to be expected of you than tragedy."

“ And you ? ”

“ I was not the least surprised, but then I know your real character which you are so fond of hiding, and then —— ”

Arthur checked himself, for he had been on the point of alluding to a wild romantic episode in the other's life. For this man too had once known what it was to be loved by a fair woman, who fascinated by his intellect, had wished to renounce rank and fortune for his sake, but love had “ stood upon the choice of friends,” she had died of a broken heart, and Charlie Alcester had never loved again.

He looked enquiringly at Arthur for an explanation of his broken sentence, but Arthur wishing to change the subject took out his cigar-case and proposed a smoke.

“ No thank you,” said Charlie, “ I want you to come with me to the theatre and see my tragedy acted—you must come—besides I want you to see the young actress who takes the part of

Magdalena. She has been playing Imogen lately, you must have heard of her, every one is raving about her beauty and her talent. Her name is Miss Ashford."

"Yes," replied Arthur, "I have heard of her; by the way," he added, as a new idea struck him, "what is her Christian name?"

"Edith. Beyond that I know nothing of her, except that she is young, beautiful, and an orphan; that she lives somewhere in Kensington, and that everything connected with her is as great a mystery to every body else as it is to me. You will come, old fellow, won't you?"

"Yes," replied Arthur, "if you'll wait till I reduce myself to the similitude of an ordinary occupant of one of the dress-boxes."

Arthur was not long, and calling a cab the two friends drove off to the theatre together.

The play had not yet commenced, and Arthur looked eagerly round the theatre in the hope that Maud might be present. She was not there,

however, though he saw many faces familiar to him.

Among these was that of a man about his own age, tall and well-dressed, with a face that would have been handsome but for its sinister expression. This was Morton Legrange, and Arthur's cheeks burned with indignation as he thought of Annie Yempson, ruined and deserted by this man, yet forgiving and loving him when she died.

He turned his eyes angrily away and saw, for the first time, reclining easily on a sofa in a box near them, listening to the conversation of a young nobleman whom he knew by sight, the woman whose beauty had once bound him with a spell—Lady Kate Glendale.

She did not notice him, and he had time to observe her narrowly. When he saw her last she was a girl of eighteen, now she was a woman of three and twenty; but her beauty had lost none of its freshness; her large, dreamy, violet

eyes were bright as ever, her long golden hair and her dazzling complexion were as beautiful as they had been in the days when Kate Rushton was the queen of his boyish fancy.

He was older now, and wiser too, for he could watch her with no deeper thought than pity. Maud's face, less regular in its features, and farther from a sculptor's ideal of perfection, was a far more fascinating study than this statuesque unchanging beauty. The one face was eloquent with mind and soul, the other —

She looked up, and their eyes met. If she had only blushed, or trembled, if the smile had faded from her lips, or a look had expressed her memory of the past, he would have ceased to believe her heartless. But no! She met his scrutiny with a gaze as steady as his own, then looked away to all appearance utterly unconcerned, and indifferent.

“What a fool I was, ever to think that girl had a heart,” he said to himself “I wonder how

many men she has fooled since I saw her last. She has no regret for the past that is clear."

But he did not know the passionate yearning in her breast to throw herself at his feet and implore his forgiveness—he could not tell that she loved him better now than when she had been his affianced bride—he did not dream that the ring he gave her lay night and day upon her bosom, rising and falling with every throb of a heart that was well nigh broken.

The play began, and Arthur soon became deeply interested in it. It was not until the third scene however that Miss Ashford, as Magdalena, appeared upon the stage, and was at once greeted with loud applause. Her appearance was very striking. She was apparently not more than seventeen, tall and graceful, with dark flashing eyes, whose lustre was increased by the pallor of her face. Her long black hair which hung far below her waist completed the fantastic beauty of her appearance.

Arthur observed all this closely, for he had not forgotten the beautiful voice he had heard in the house at Kensington, and little Nellie Yempson had told him many stories of 'Miss Edith,' how kind and beautiful she was, but as he watched the young actress, her beauty heightened by her strange dress and the glare of the footlights, a conviction grew up in his mind that she was like some one he had known, and recalled some indistinct memory, though what it was he could not tell.

With this new interest in her awakened, he watched the course of the tragedy closely. The character Edith Ashford sustained was that of a Spanish Princess young and beautiful, whose leading traits were pride and passion. The first scenes showed her in all her pomp of power, loved and loving, honoured and caressed, and Arthur was rather disappointed with her rendering of many passages, but as the plot thickened, as her life became shadowed by treachery as one by one

whom she had trusted forsook her, her acting was a triumph of dramatic art. Her every word and look conveyed an intensity of feeling that was almost painful to observe. As her acting became more intense, Arthur's belief that she recalled some memory, or some fancy of his mind grew stronger.

He tried to think what it was, but the impression could neither be shaken off nor explained away.

All this while she had met misfortune with proud disdain, but now a priest brought her tidings of her lover's death. The love scenes in the play had been very beautiful—poetically they were the finest in the tragedy, dramatically also they were effective showing the gentler side of Magdalena's character. But in this last scene she seemed stunned by the fatal tidings the priest conveyed, as he proceeded in his story of the death struggle, and gave her a ring drawn from the dead warrior's finger, the consciousness of his

meaning seemed to dawn upon her, and she flung herself upon the ground in utter hopeless despair.

With her streaming black hair and her pale face so piteously beautiful, she looked like a fallen angel hearing her doom pronounced, as she wailed the cry—

“For me there is naught i’ the ruined world but death.

Priest.—

Not so: though hopes lay withered at our feet
Like leaves torn from the boughs by cutting winds,
Work still remains, and prayer, that angels’ wings
Will carry home to God.

Magdalena.

Oh heaven ’tis vain

To speak of work to hearts that long for death.
Your wise words fall like white flow’rs on a tomb,
They’re beautiful and fragrant, but think not
That they will wake the quiet soul beneath
Whose smile was once our heaven; ’twere as well
To bid a fever’s thirst be slaked with gems,
Or bind a bleeding wound with bands of gold.”

Her attitude as she uttered these passionate words was one of utter abandonment to grief, and when she rose from the ground her face seemed to have grown haggard with misery.

After the conclusion of this scene there was an absolute hush in the theatre, then the building rang with loud applause.

Arthur had found the key to his fancy that she reminded him of some one. As he saw the Spanish princess in an attitude of prostrate agony, he remembered how Maud had flung herself on the body of her dead father, and tried by cries and caresses to bring back the soul she loved.

Edith Ashford reminded him of Maud Atherton—in face they were not alike—Maud's dark blue eyes and rich brown hair would have formed a striking contrast to the eyes and hair, 'black as a raven's feather,' of the actress; nor was there any similarity in their ordinary manner, for Edith Ashford was tragical in every act and gesture, while Maud's surface characteristic was love of laughter; but Arthur remembered now that when he had seen Maud's wild grief, and noticed her suppressed intensity of feeling, he

had drawn a picture of what Maud would be, but for her cultured mind and the lighter elements of her character, and it was of this that Edith Ashford so strangely reminded him.

The two remaining scenes were comparatively unimportant, for the real interest of the tragedy ended with Magdalena's despair. The last scene showed her cold and dead, stabbed to the heart by her own hand. It was little more than a tableau, the inevitable sequence to the agony that had broken her heart.

The tragedy had been printed and published before, but this was the first night of its public representation, and the curtain fell amid enthusiastic applause and loud cries for the author.

But Charlie Alcester drew farther back into the box.

"I won't spoil that last effect by the sight of my ugly face," he said, trying to speak lightly, though he was greatly excited and his eyes were

filled with tears. "What do you think of Edith Ashford?" he asked.

"She was wonderful," said Arthur, drawing a long breath, "her scene with the priest was one of the finest things I ever saw in my life. It was an artistic triumph of yours Alcester to virtually end the play there, nine authors out of ten would have added a stabbing scene and spoilt it all."

"Yes," replied the author eagerly, "the manager wanted that, but Edith Ashford understood it directly as you do. 'Magdalena's heart was broken,' she said 'she would die without uttering another word.' Don't you think she will be one of the greatest actresses of the day?"

"No," said Arthur, decidedly, "I do not."

"Surely," exclaimed his companion, "even your critical taste could not find any fault with her acting to-night."

"No," replied Arthur, "my only criticism is that it was not acting at all. She *was* Magdalena,

because the Spanish princess's nature was like her own. As Desdmona, Viola, Rosalind, or Beatrice she would fail."

"Yes," replied the other, "I think you are right, her sympathies are hardly catholic enough for a wide range of art, but she is a wonderful actress for all that."

"Of that there can be no question whatever, I think," said Arthur, thoughtfully, "that girl's own life will be a tragedy, not necessarily of outward events but of inward passion and feeling. She will love but once, and if anything should cross her worship her heart will break."

In the unsounded depths of life there are few mysteries more baffling, more suggestive of unseen influences on our minds than our instinctive presentiment of impending danger.

The time came when Arthur's words returned to him with all the force of a fulfilled prediction.

CHAPTER IV.

“ We have lived separate lives, unlike, unsought,
Each by the other. Wherefore meet we now ? ”

Philip James Bailey.

(Festus.)

ONE evening a few weeks after his visit to the theatre with Charlie Alcester, Arthur was returning home to his lodging in Fleet Street, when his attention was arrested unexpectedly.

He was just passing the Mansion House when a cab drew up there, from which a woman alighted. She was very plainly dressed, and wore a thick black veil that completely hid her face, but she had drawn off one of her gloves to pay the

cabman, and Arthur saw that her hand was not only white and very delicately formed, but was sparkling with rings. She did not pause for a moment, but having paid the man walked rapidly down King William Street.

Arthur looked wonderingly after her. Her figure was tall and queenly, and her whole bearing seemed to belie her plain dress as emphatically as her jewelled fingers had done. What could be her motive too for leaving the cab here, and walking through the muddy streets, unless she wished to avoid observation—perhaps detection? These thoughts flashed through Arthur's mind, as he watched the figure disappear and hesitated whether or not to follow it.

“I say, Bill,” he overheard the cabman say, “here's a game. I picked up a splendid lookin' gal at the West End, and she says to me, says she, ‘drive me to the City;’ and I says, ‘yes, miss, what part might you desire?’ She was all of a tremble, fit to drop she seemed, but she

spoke up as game as anything. 'Near London Bridge.' So I says (for she'd raised her weil to speak to me, and I see at once she was a reg'lar out-and-outer. 'Well my lady,' I says, 'I can put you down at the Bridge itself if you like,' and she jumps in, only saying 'drive fast;' but just now calls out to me to stop, gives me a sovereign and bolts."

The gentleman addressed as Bill had taken a languid interest in the story, while it depended for force on the beauty and mystery of the fair passenger, but at the mention of the sovereign he brightened up, and suggested the fitness of indulging in some light refreshment at his companion's expense.

But the cabman's words had decided Arthur as to what course he should pursue. Always impulsive and rapid in thought and action, he stayed to ask no further question, but walked quickly in the same direction that the veiled lady had taken, determined to fathom the mystery.

As he reached the bottom of the street he saw her standing beside the statue, with her face towards London Bridge. She appeared to hesitate a moment, then turned down Eastcheap.

It was not later than six o'clock, but it was dark as midnight, not a star was shining, and the moon was hidden behind a stormy mass of clouds. The darkness enabled Arthur to follow the unknown figure unobserved.

He noticed that she seemed to shrink from contact with anybody, and that she appeared ignorant of the locality, but though she hesitated sometimes she never enquired the way, and never looked back.

She turned down St. Mary-at-Hill apparently because it was quieter than the other lanes, and Arthur narrowed the distance between them, for he began to dread the end of this strange journey.

She paused a moment on finding herself in Thames Street, then crossing the road she walked steadily on till she reached a narrow passage

leading to the river, her momentary hesitation was now over, for she entered the dark passage immediately—Arthur following very close behind.

The passage led to one of the minor wharves, a dull and dreary place in broad daylight when business was transacted there, but now the old crazy looking warehouses, the black hulls of ships at anchor, dimly to be seen in the distance, the darkness of the night, and the black river so cold and pitiless, flowing on silently with nature's maddening disregard of human anguish, seemed fit surroundings for the woman standing on the river's brink longing for death.

She had dropped her veil upon the ground as a thing of no further use, and stood looking at the black water as though it had a terrible fascination for her; even now though Arthur stood beside her, she was so absorbed in her own wild thoughts as to be unsonscious of his presence.

He was so near her, that he could hold her back by force at any moment, but he did not

touch her, hoping she might yet abandon her terrible design without his aid.

But if any momentary longing for life had asserted itself, it was gone, for with a wild cry of despair that rang in Arthur's ears long long afterwards, she threw her shawl from her and would have leaped into the stream if he had not caught her round the waist, and held her in his strong arms with a grasp she could not loosen.

She uttered one exclamation of astonishment at a rescue that seemed almost supernatural, then struggled silently with him in all the strength of utter despair.

But though she seemed gifted with unnatural force, she was powerless in the athletic arms that held her. Gradually her resistance weakened, and her struggles ceased. Then Arthur loosened his grasp, but, still holding her wrist, stood between her and the river.

All this while he had not seen her face nor had she seen his. But now the moon emerged from

behind the clouds, and shining full upon her revealed the queenly beauty of Lady Kate Glendale.

But not as he had seen her last, her red lips curving into smiles, her eyes flashing brighter than the jewels in her hair; all that was changed, and in place of self-complacent gladness was a look of reckless, hopeless misery.

Yet she had never looked so beautiful as now. Mere perfection of outline, of form, of colour will always leave a deeper depth of beauty unsounded. Lady Glendale was wonderfully endowed with physical beauty, but her ordinary expression was tame and trivial, hiding rather than revealing her thought. Now dissimulation and the parody of life she had been playing were at an end, and her long lashed violet eyes were eloquent with a deeper agony than ever artist painted or sculptor wrought.

They stood looking at each other in silent wonder for some moments, then she said hoarsely—

“ Why have you saved me? It is better I should die? ”

Arthur was angry with himself for pitying this woman. Why should he speak more gently to her because she had wonderful eyes and golden hair? His life lately had brought him into daily contact with misery patiently borne, and sorrow cheerfully endured, why should he feel any sentimental sympathy with this woman because her face was fair?

He answered coldly—

“ I followed you Lady Glendale without any thought that it was you, and I saved you as I would save any woman if I could, from death like that.”

She answered bitterly—

“ Yes, I know that, you have sympathy and help for women who are poor and despised and you think that because I am called rich I need none. I tell you there is no sorrow like mine.”

The same trivial nature so hard to general

suffering, so slow to recognise the misery of others, yet so quick to cry to heaven, ‘there is no agony like mine!’

Arthur answered sternly—

“I am in no mood to play the courtier Lady Glendale, and I should be false to truth and manhood if I did not deny your words. Have you ever thought—have you ever cared to think how the great heart of humanity throbs with pain? Have you ever tried to make one heart happy at the sacrifice of self? Have you ever shed a tear for the sufferings of others?”

“I am so miserable,” she wailed the words piteously like a child’s cry of pain.

“You have won the life you longed for,” he replied, determined not to yield to the pleading of those large sad eyes, “you have rank and fortune—queens might envy your beauty. What can your suffering be to the misery of thousands of women, whom you would not make the paltriest sacrifice to help?”

“The things you speak of are curses,” she said, wildly, “the parade of fashion wearies me, my life is a continual lie, and as for my beauty that is the greatest curse of all.”

The moments sometimes come, though rarely in life, when souls stand undisguised before each other, and the inmost secrets of the heart are unveiled as they appear to the sight of God.

“Last night,” she said, in the same excited tone, “I watched the pictures in the fire, and I saw nothing in them but ruin, misery, and shame ; then I thought of the river, and I longed to die. You are cruel, Arthur, why did you save me if you had nothing for me but reproach ? ”

And exhausted by excitement, she fell fainting at his feet.

Arthur caught her in his arms and laid her gently on the ground ; then sprinkled her face with water, and tried to revive her.

“God forgive me,” he said to himself, “who

am I that I should be harsh to her? She needs comfort not reproach."

In the struggle her dress had been torn; as he bent over the unconscious figure he saw the ring he had given her long ago, lying on her bosom.

But he saw also what made him clench his hand angrily and mutter something that was almost a curse. Upon the fair white bosom was a dark bruise, and the delicate skin was broken, a damning proof that it had been heavily struck by a brutal hand.

She soon opened her eyes and looked around her with a startled wonder at her situation, but the black river seemed to explain everything to her. She shuddered at the sight of it, and turned her face away. Arthur gently assisted her to rise.

"Are you strong enough for me to help you home?" he said.

"I cannot go home," she answered wearily, "or if it must be so, let it be any time rather

than to-night. I dare not face my husband again, and to-night he is giving a great dinner-party."

"I will see to all that," said Arthur, "I will make him promise never to question you concerning to-night, and you shall not have to face those people."

"I thought you were angry with me," she said, "I am wicked and selfish, but oh, I am so miserable!"

"I know it now," he replied, "but I did not suspect the truth when I spoke so sternly to you just now. I was wrong—but you will forgive me, will you not?"

She had faced his sternness, as she had struggled with his endeavour to save her, but at his gentleness her courage forsook her utterly. She threw herself at his feet and sobbed in broken hearted agony—

"Forgive," she cried passionately, "it is I who must pray for the forgiveness you can never

grant. I never thought to tell you all—I thought if I disguised myself and came down to this dreadful place no one would know of it; that if my body were washed on shore they would think it some poor miserable woman and make few enquiries. I wanted to escape and be forgotten, but now that you have saved me I must tell you all.”

He tried to lift her from the ground, but she cried in the same piteous tone.

“No let me stay here at your feet, it is the fittest place for me. Will you hear me?”

“I will hear anything you have to say,” he answered, taking her hand in his, “but if you would ask forgiveness that is needless I forgave you fully months ago.”

“But I want you to know the truth,” she said “If I am to live let me know that you do not think me worse than I am. When we parted last, when I was to have been your wife, I never dreamed of anything coming to separate us. My

words and my caresses were not a lie—I swear in the sight of God that I loved you then, that I love you now—that I have loved you always.”

Her voice had sunk almost to a whisper now, but she spoke with a passionate earnestness, and with the fluent speech of one uttering long cherished thoughts.

“When your letter came,” she went on, “saying that you had lost all chance of fortune, I wrote a reply saying that it made no change to me; but they all at home persuaded me not to send it. They spoke of all that I must sacrifice and endure—that everyone would laugh at me; that with my extravagant tastes I should be miserable if I were not rich—and I was young and foolish, weak and selfish; I dreaded being poor and having to think about shillings and pence, and I wrote you that letter —”

Her tears fell fast, but she dashed them away and resumed in a firmer voice.

“But I kept your ring—I could not part with

that. I took it from my finger, but I have worn it on my breast day and night ever since. I have lied about it to my husband, when he asked me I said it was given me by my mother the day she died."

Arthur looked down at her beautiful face with a strange medley of feeling. It is impossible for a man of strong feelings to watch the agony of a beautiful woman unmoved, even if he has taken no active part in making her life miserable; and Arthur knew that her sorrow sprung from her hopeless love for him. There had been a time too, when this woman had been dearer to him than anything in the world; and though that was years ago, and his heart had learned to worship at a nobler shrine, he could not but view with tender pity the proud beauty humbled at his feet. But then he remembered the wedding-ring upon her finger, and the words of comfort died upon his lips.

As though she divined his thoughts, she continued:

“ My marriage was the vilest act of all. I did not love Sir Thomas Glendale—I despised him, but I was dazzled by his wealth—I had parted from you for ever, you would never care for me again, I should never love anyone else ; I knew that, and I sold myself for wealth and for an envied position in society.”

She had left off crying and spoke firmly now, sheer despair inspiring her.

“ I am not talented and true-hearted like you, Arthur, I am shallow and selfish ; but I am not so utterly without a soul as to be made happy by money alone. I was made miserable by my husband’s coarseness, I was made miserable by his neglect ; then he grew jealous of me, and now he is cruel—sometimes I dread that he will kill me.”

She shuddered at the image that presented itself to her mind, with a sensitive woman’s instinctive shrinking from physical violence.

“ I have never given him cause for jealousy,”

she said. "I am surrounded by men who do not hesitate to tempt me, and many women with truer souls than mine, would have been forced by his brutality into sin; but this ring upon my breast has been a talisman, and the memory of your love has kept me pure."

She had completely dropped all disguise and confessed all this crouching at his feet, as though he alone had the power of all the world to help and comfort her.

"But last night," she went on in the same low tone of earnestness, "he was coarser and more brutal in his language than he had ever been before, and when I answered he struck me. Then I felt I could live with him no longer—two paths lay before me, shame and death. For myself I was reckless, but for your sake I chose death. You know all now—you will not let me die—tell me is there hope or comfort in heaven or earth for me? Is there even forgiveness?"

Arthur raised her gently from the ground and

looked sadly at her face, so beautiful and pale in the moonlight, with a weary sense of the weakness of any comfort he could give her.

“Life is never easy,” he said, “sometimes it is terribly hard. I dare not mock you with false consolation and say the path before you is a pleasant one. But it is a possible one, be sure of that.”

He paused a moment, while she anxiously watched his face as though he were pronouncing a sentence from which appeal was impossible upon her life.

“You ask me,” he continued, “if there is forgiveness for you in heaven or earth. Whatever you doubt do not question that. God knows that I forgive you, Katie—and He is more merciful than I.”

The old pet name of long ago, rose to his lips by a kind of instinct, and passed them almost unconsciously, but the word revived the weary desolate girl, like wine to dying lips.

"Tell me," she said, looking up with a new hope into his face, "what can I do? If there is any hope for me tell me how and where it is to be found."

"It lies in patience," he answered, "in thought for others, in quiet labour, whenever usefulness is possible, and uncomplaining endurance of the inevitable. You have been ill trained for so hard a life, but nothing great is attained without pain, and it may be that your soul can only be taught its deepest possibilities, by the ordeal of fire. The duty before you is clear Katie, and hard as it is, I believe you will accomplish it."

She looked eagerly into his face, and said—

"If you believe in me, I will try and believe in myself too, only say one more word of forgiveness to me, for I shall never hear your voice again."

"I trust you, Katie," said Arthur slowly, "I have faith in your resolve. I believe you will yet redeem the past by a life of duty and endurance."

In spite of his wonted self-control his strong voice trembled and his eyes filled with tears. She saw it, and a new strange gladness was at her heart, which all her misery could not kill.

She looked up into his face with eyes that yearned for one word or look of love, and he took her in his arms and tenderly kissed her.

A kiss of trust, of remembered tenderness, and of a last farewell, for she knew as well as he that further intercourse between them was impossible.

They spoke no further word, but he offered her his arm, which she took in silence, and they walked together once more into the lighted streets.

Here he called a cab, and gave the driver the necessary directions to Sir Thomas Glendale's house. It was a strange time for them both, for the scene by the river had brought the two natures so widely different in constitution, in aim and in culture, nearer together than the common intimacy of years.

But it had also separated them by placing a barrier between them, more hopeless than mere estrangement or forgetfulness. When their lips had met together, it had been for a kiss not of plighted troth, the earnest of future companionship, but the kiss of a dead past's remembrance, and of farewell with hands unclasping for separate work in the divided future.

Lady Glendale saw this as clearly as Arthur himself, she must tread the path before her alone, she must still endure the dreary routine of commonplace life of which she was weary to the heart, she must do the work he had indicated to her without his help, while he had the world before him, and was fast gaining honour and renown. "We have parted already," she thought, "and for ever."

So they spoke no more to each other; but Arthur's gentleness and respect when he touched her, in handing her in and out of the cab, gave her the same comfort his words had done, for the

deference of a nature felt to be higher than our own is a mighty power, especially to women.

It was eight o'clock when they reached the mansion Lady Glendale called home. The servant who answered Arthur's knock seemed surprised to see his mistress, whom the household supposed to be upstairs dressing for dinner, returning in this unusual style in the society of a stranger; and on seeing her pale face was about to ask if she were ill, but she gave him no opportunity, for inclining her head slightly to Arthur, who bowed in return but did not proffer his hand, she walked slowly up the broad staircase, entered her own room and locked the door. The servant watched her disappear and then turned to Arthur as though for explanation; but he only held out his card and said:

"I know Sir Thomas Glendale is in, kindly ask him to spare me a few minutes conversation on a matter of urgent importance."

He was ushered into the library, which the

footman re-entered after a few minutes absence to say that Sir Thomas would prefer an interview on the morrow, when he would have ampler leisure, if Mr. Calverley's business could be postponed.

"But it cannot be," said Arthur, firmly. "Tell Sir Thomas I cannot accept an excuse."

This message had the desired effect; for five minutes afterwards Sir Thomas Glendale entered the room, and he and Arthur encountered each other for the first time. Each knew the other by repute, holding him somewhat in contempt. Arthur from his conception of the Baronet's character, which was not of a nature to command reverence; Sir Thomas because he viewed all artists, authors, and critics with disdain; classifying them as 'poor devils, who made less money in a year than he could gain on 'Change in a morning.'

"I have granted this interview at some inconvenience to myself," he said, "in deference to

your rather importunate request. Perhaps you will be equally considerate and make it a short one."

"That will depend entirely on yourself Sir Thomas," replied Arthur, "the object of my visit is soon expressed, it is to make a statement and three demands."

"Demands, Mr. Calverley," echoed Sir Thomas in high disdain, "that is not language I am used to."

"If these were usual circumstances I should not be here."

"I hope not," said the Baronet trying to be coolly contemptuous, "at all events I hope you are prepared for these demands as you call them to be refused."

"On the contrary I am morally certain they will be granted."

Sir Thomas looked angrily at his visitor as if to detect whether this were idle boasting or not. But Arthur's face expressed so unmistakably the

calm sense of superiority, and the consciousness of a strong position that he began to be afraid of him.

“I am a poor hand at guessing riddles,” he said, “perhaps you will take a chair Mr. Calverley, and explain yourself.”

Arthur declined the chair by a slight gesture and answered in the same quiet resolute tone he had adopted from the first.

“Further preface is unnecessary. The statement I have to make is simply this. I found Lady Glendale to-night on one of the City wharves, where if I had not exerted my utmost strength she would have drowned herself.”

Sir Thomas Glendale turned white with passion, he had not dreamed that Arthur’s communication would be of this nature, and his fear of him increased in consequence. He was silent for a few moments then he said.

“If this is true I thank you, and as the subject is a painful one I beg to leave it there.”

“ I refuse to do so,” said Arthur quietly, “ for I know the reason why you shrink from the subject. If your wife had died to-night the guilt of blood would have been at your door as assuredly as if you had plunged a knife into her breast. And you know it.”

“ It’s a lie,” shouted the other, flying to bluster, the common refuge of coarse and narrow minds. “ What the devil do you mean by talking in this fashion in my own house? ”

Arthur answered him with a quiet disdain far more difficult to cope with than any violence.

“ I have not come here to talk of myself, so I will thank you to confine your remarks to the question at issue. What I said was true, and you know it. If, therefore, you refuse to grant the demands I spoke of, my course of action lies clearly before me.”

A loud knock at the street door announced the arrival of the first guest.

“ What course would you take,” enquired the Baronet, hurriedly.

“I would enter your dining room, and declare to your assembled guests what I have seen to-night; and tell them also that Sir Thomas Glendale—whose ambition it is to be received and respected in what he considers good society, whose latest fancy is philanthropy, who took the chair last Thursday at a religious meeting—ill-treats his wife, who bears upon her breast the marks of a brutality that would disgrace a scavenger.”

Sir Thomas dropped into a chair as though he had been struck a heavy blow. It was useless trying—he could not cope with Arthur, and he was stung by the contempt of his words into impotent anger.

“You spoke of demands,” he said at last, in a cowed tone. “What are they?”

“They are very moderate,” was the reply, “and you dare not refuse them. Lady Glendale is nervous and excited after the events of to-night. I must request you to make the excuse

to your guests that she is unwell, (which is literally true,) and cannot see them. That is my first demand."

"I consent to that," said the Baronet, "it is perfectly reasonable. What else have you to ask?"

"I claim from you in the second place the promise that you will never trouble your wife by any allusions to her actions this evening."

Sir Thomas hesitated. He felt keenly humiliated by these imperative requests. He longed to defy this man, to challenge him to do his worst, to taunt him with base designs on Lady Glendale, but he dared not do it.

"I see no ground for your hesitation," said Arthur, "the part you have played in to-night's drama is not so noble that you should care to refer to it."

"I accede to that request also," said Sir Thomas slowly. "What is your last demand?"

"It is of a more important nature than the

others," replied Arthur, "but I do not think you will refuse it. Your marriage was a terrible mistake, and evil has been the fruit of it. Between you and Lady Glendale love is impossible, and even friendly affection can only be the slow growth of time. But you can exercise courtesy and forbearance towards her, you can give her the common deference a gentleman gives a lady, in a word you can make her life a little less like hell than it has been lately. My third and last demand is that you will solemnly swear to me to-night that you will make earnest efforts to do so."

Sir Thomas rose and looked Arthur full in the face; his anger had died out like a fire of straw, and a feeling, strange and new to him, of respect for the man who had vanquished him had taken its place. Sir Thomas Glendale was not wholly bad—few men are; but success is a dangerous school for small natures, and his character had been distorted and deformed by flattery. Since

he was known to be a millionaire incense had been freely burnt before him, and not always by corrupt hands. Who has not the good taste to be silent concerning the faults of a great capitalist?

Men of honour, intellect and culture had sat at his table, and after praising his wine, had passed by imperceptible degrees into praising the host who provided it. If Pope had written—

“ For points of faith let graceless zealots fight,
He can't be wrong whose wine cellar is right.”

he would have had no lack of supporters.

Sir Thomas Glendale had taken all homage paid to his cheque-book and his wine-cellar as disinterested worship for himself, and to be scorned, defied and commanded, was an experience he had never thought of. He had been angry with Arthur not only for crossing his path, but for having the right side of the quarrel, but as his sense of powerlessness in the matter was forced upon him, his respect for his conqueror

increased also. It is rather opposed to our commonly accepted axioms of human nature, but it is undeniably true that some men must be humbled to the dust before they will submit to the indignity of being taught.

Sir Thomas was silent for some minutes struggling with the conflict of feeling in his mind, then he said in quite an altered tone—

“ Mr. Calverley, I will be frank with you. It is useless for me to deny that I struck my wife last night, but I am not the incarnate brute you think me, and I will try to make her happier in the future. I swear that I will, so help me God.”

“ In that case,” said Arthur, taking up his hat, “ I need not trouble you any further. Whatever your faults may be Sir Thomas, I do not think you are a man to break an oath like the one you have uttered, so I forbear from anything like threats, but on the ground of self interest, if you are wise you will prevent our encountering each other again.”

“One word more Mr. Calverley,” said the Baronet, in a hesitating tone, “you have spoken your opinion of me very plainly, and you have gained all your points. Have you generosity enough to shake hands?”

“Certainly,” replied Arthur, in some surprise. “I refuse to touch no hand offered in good faith. It costs any man an effort to confess himself in the wrong I know, and I will take your last words as a hopeful omen of a brighter future.”

And so the interview ended, the two men shook hands and parted for ever.

But the guests, who had grown extremely wrathful and impatient at the non-appearance of either host or hostess, noticed that evening that Sir Thomas Glendale was unusually moody and depressed, offering no remarks even when his favourite subjects were broached. The more charitable among them ascribed this to the illness of Lady Glendale, but others shook their heads and said nothing, as profoundly as

circumstances admitted. But the dinner had been sumptuous enough for royalty, and further enquiry was no concern of theirs.

Arthur sat in his own little room till late that night, watching the dying embers of the fire and thinking of all the past memories the events of the night awakened. The mad boyish fancy of long ago was buried for ever, and in its stead had risen the strong love and earnest worship of a man's heart. He had tender pity and chivalrous respect for the woman he had rescued that night; but he turned with relief from the thought of her to the thought of Maud. Of the face more deeply beautiful, because soul and mind found utterance in it; of the nature witchingly contradictory on the surface, but earnest and true in its silent depths; of the heart, rich in the wealth of which earth has no counterpart—the wealth of true womanhood.

And meanwhile Lady Glendale lay on the floor where she had flung herself on first entering the

room, her hair falling loosely round her, in an agony of thought, and passion, and feeling.

Her petty ideas, her social fictions, her selfish aims had been roughly uprooted and the truth, stern and dreary, lay before her.

But through all the darkness Arthur's words shone like stars to the mariner in unknown seas.

"I trust you Katie—I have faith in your resolve—I believe you will yet redeem the past by a life of duty and endurance."

CHAPTER V.

Ophelia.—"What means this, my lord?"

Hamlet.—"Marry, this is miching mallecho, it means mischief."

Shakespeare.

LITTLE Nellie Yempson made rapid progress in all her studies, and became a great favourite with all who knew her, receiving far more indulgence than most systems of philosophy consider conducive to the higher developement of character. But some natures can stand a great deal of petting without being spoiled, and hers was one of them. Perhaps her former stern training of poverty and want may have been the

cause, but the child was always obedient, though the governess who lured her on to slight skirmishes with knowledge, included caresses in the lessons far more frequently than educational committees as a rule would sanction, while Mrs. Collop could refuse her nothing, and Sarah declared there never was such a child except (but that with her was always an exception) her darling Miss Maud. Sarah's memory was conveniently unconscious that Maud had been extremely naughty and troublesome, but as she had never admitted that painfully palpable fact at the time, it can scarcely be wondered at that she ignored it now.

Little Nellie Yempson made another friend however in rather a singular manner. There was no stronger feeling in her nature perhaps (except her love for Arthur) than the passionate delight in music. On the occasion of her first appearance in these pages, it had been through following an organ-grinder that she had lost her way, and this

was not the first of her wanderings in pursuit of harmony. Good music she had never even imagined, but two or three days after she came to the house in Kensington she heard Edith Ashford sing. Sarah never forgot her strange excitement while the music lasted, or her tears at the conclusion, and from that day the most terrible penalty that could be threatened her was that she should never hear Miss Ashford sing again.

From that time the drawing-room became a holy temple to her; a place from which sweet sounds mysteriously issued, and echoes from heaven might be heard. This passionate love of music, always a mystery to minds the most cultured, defies analysis utterly when it is found in uneducated and childish natures. But when science has climbed to heights of which we dream not now, when mechanical genius has virtually annihilated distance, when the vague fancies of our great ones have become sober

realities, and mines of yet unknown truth have yielded their treasures for the benefit of mankind, there will still remain two mysteries that cannot be explained—love and music.

Nellie knew nothing either of philosophy or musical science, but she listened when Edith Ashford played or sang with a far deeper appreciation than nineteen out of twenty of the people among her public audiences, who threw bouquets at the young prima donna's feet. She would creep up to the drawing-room at these times and listen while the music lasted with rapt delight. One day, Miss Ashford coming out unexpectedly found her, and the child entreating not to be sent away, Edith had given her leave to come into the drawing-room as often as she liked. Shyness was not one of Nellie's characteristics, and she gratefully availed herself of the permission. One day when she had been sitting motionless by the piano, wandering in a dream-land of delight and wonder, Miss Ashford said to her—

“Would you like to play and sing Nellie? I will teach you, if you like.”

The child looked up with a kind of wondering incredulity. ‘Miss Edith’s’ piano was almost as sacred a mystery in her eyes as an angel’s lyre: was it possible that *her* fingers should touch the instrument and compel it to murmur forth its hidden secrets? She burst into tears.

“If you will teach me, Miss Edith,” she sobbed, “I will always do what you tell me—and I’ll never be naughty—and I’ll always love you—and I’ll tell Mr. Calverley—and he’ll love you too.”

So the music lessons commenced, and from that day no one but Arthur had such sovereign control over the child as Edith Ashford. Nellie told her new friend everything about her life in Abel Alley, and how Arthur had come there a few days before her mother’s death and made the whole world bright and different for her. The missing links in the story Sarah (always loquacious) supplied under the seal of strict confidence.

Edith Ashford was a lonely, friendless orphan, with no object on which to spend her love but the arts of music and acting, for which she was fast gaining a brilliant renown; but at eighteen the heart of a woman must love something more tangible and responsive to affection even than divine harmonies or enchanted dreams, and though Edith Ashford had what would commonly be considered a transcendental worship for art, the living sympathy even of a child was intensely precious to her, so that between herself and Nellie Yempson there had grown up a very deep and very singular affection.

One evening, about a fortnight after his interview with Sir Thomas Glendale, Arthur had called at Mrs. Collop's house to see how his little Raven was getting on, and had made himself agreeable in the usual fashion by games and stories, and by listening to descriptions more or less extraordinary of Miss Edith and her gentleness.

When he left the house it was still early, and as he had many things on his mind demanding deep thought, he determined to walk home.

“ I can’t think properly cooped up in a room,” he said to himself, “ and the walk will do me good,” so choosing the quieter streets that his reflections might be uninterrupted, he started at a round pace for home.

In his way he passed a small Roman Catholic Chapel, and his attention was arrested by the sound of music. The organist was playing one of Bach’s fugues, and playing it so well that Arthur entered the Chapel to hear it more distinctly.

The organist was only practising, and the dimly lighted Chapel was almost empty. There were one or two people present however engaged in silent prayer, and among them was Edith Ashford.

The subdued light of a lamp streamed upon her downcast head, and the dim aisles of the

deserted Chapel seemed a fitting background for the kneeling figure. Arthur's first thought of the contrast to the picture when he had seen her last in the fantastic dress of the Spanish princess with the glare of the theatre full upon her, gave way to a deeper feeling. Would not this be even a more natural end to Magdalena's sufferings? A shattered dream world, a hopeless love and then not death, but the more deeply tragical existence of a heart that bleeds yet lives on—in patience, sorrow and prayer.

He left the Chapel noiselessly that he might not disturb her, and as he re-entered the street almost brushed against two men walking together in conversation, so earnest that they did not see his face though one of them uttered a hurried word of apology, in a voice Arthur knew well.

It was the voice of Morton Legrange; Arthur was glad to be unrecognised, for the wrongs of Annie Yempson were too fresh in his mind for

him to speak with any degree of calmness to the father of her child.

But as he looked back he noticed that the two men paced backwards and forwards as though waiting for some one, the thought struck him that they were muffled up by their scarves and great coats so as to be disguised, and he felt half-inclined to turn back and see the end of the matter.

“I wonder if Legrange is up to any more devilish work,” he muttered to himself, hesitating whether or not to retrace his steps, “but it’s no concern of mine,” he thought, and walked onward.

But his mind was not at rest. Could Legrange have any designs upon Edith Ashford? He asked himself the question, and could find no grounds for a decided negative. What could be Legrange’s motive for loitering outside a Roman Catholic chapel in an obscure Kensington Street? Arthur had seen him at the theatre looking with

undisguised admiration at the heroine of the evening; she was young, beautiful, and friendless, and Legrange was just the man to be fascinated by her and pursue her without remorse. Perhaps she knew him and this was a meeting by appointment; in that case did he not owe a duty to the girl to return and tell her the dark story of Annie Yempson's life and death? But on the other hand it seemed absurd to take a decided action on what might only be ingenious conjecture of his own. He could not tell whether to go back or not.

But just as he was wavering a carriage drove rapidly past him, and one glance at the driver removed all indecision from his mind. Arthur knew the man well. He was the son of a wealthy tradesman who had sent him to college with the avowed intention of making a gentleman of him. But manufacture of this kind is attended with difficulties when the raw material is bad; John Wilson preferred to be a vagabond, and having

tried the innocent recreations of drinking, gambling and forgery—having broken his mother's heart and almost ruined his father by his extravagance, he found himself alone in the world with no capital but a well deserved reputation for roguery.

After numerous grades of employment, including card sharpening, he became billiard marker at a disreputable saloon. Here Morton Legrange met him and took him into his service, nominally as his valet, in reality because he was a safe confederate for any scheme, who would do what he was told and tell no tales.

Arthur knew all this, and knew also he was not Legrange's ordinary coachman. The presence of John Wilson in this manner was a certain indication that some vile conspiracy was impending, as the appearance of certain sea birds is the infallible prophecy of a coming storm.

Arthur hesitated no longer but walked rapidly back to the Chapel; Legrange and his companion

were still lingering near the door, and as the carriage passed them they waved a salute of recognition to the driver.

Hiding himself in the shadow of the building, a proceeding favoured by the night, Arthur watched the two men narrowly, being perfectly willing to become an actor in the drama, if occasion required.

He had not long to wait ; in about five minutes Edith Ashford came out alone. Morton Legrange and his companion drew back to be unobserved, waited a few moments, and then stealthily followed her.

But not alone—for Arthur, in no very gentle mood followed close behind, determined to frustrate the conspiracy. His first and most congenial thought had been to attack these men openly and thrash Legrange till he howled for help. But this plan was fraught with danger, and any miscarriage of it involved the possibility of their scheme's success. In the moments of waiting

Arthur had formed a plan equally bold, and more likely to be successful.

Edith Ashford walked on quite unconscious of the danger which threatened her, until she reached the carriage driven by John Wilson, which was drawn up right across the road so that she could not easily pass.

The road here was very narrow and lonely, Arthur heard her request the coachman to allow her to pass. The man made some evasive reply, and at this moment Morton Legrange and his compainon arrived on the spot; then Arthur heard them asking her to enter the carriage, and her indignant refusal. She gave a stifled shriek for help, and attempted vainly to struggle with the men, but in little more than a minute, they had forced her into the carriage and driven rapidly away.

Arthur had noticed that the vehicle was a large one with a place behind for two footmen; to follow the carriage and clamber into this position

was not a very easy feat, but Arthur accomplished it triumphantly.

Having succeeded so far he managed to climb on the roof, and by that means seat himself at the driver's side. So quietly was all this done, that the man was unconscious of Arthur's presence till he sprang upon the box-seat.

John Wilson gave a cry of astonishment, and the reins fell from his hands, Arthur caught them, and from that moment felt that the game was won.

"Wilson," he said, firmly, "I intend to drive myself. If you're not a fool you'll sit still, if you give me any trouble I shall knock you into the road, and supposing you chanced to fall on your head, which is far from impossible, the consequences might be unpleasant."

John Wilson's only reply was to strike Arthur across the face with his whip. The attack was illtimed—in a towering passion through all he had seen that evening, and smarting with pain

from the lash, Arthur returned it by a blow so true and powerful that it knocked the man from his seat into the road.

He fell into a heap of mud which probably saved his life, though it did not improve his appearance. Relieved that the consequences of his rashness were no worse, Arthur turned the horses' heads in the direction of the main thoroughfare.

All this was done so rapidly, that Legrange and his companion, whose attention was fully occupied in keeping their prisoner quiet, had no suspicion that anything was wrong, till turning a corner sharply they entered the High Street, and stopped outside one of the largest shops.

"What the devil is this for," cried Legrange, "I told Wilson to choose the quietest streets."

He was not left long in doubt. Arthur, who had quite recovered his coolness, dismounted from the box and opened the carriage door. Edith Ashford gave an involuntary cry of

recognition and delight, and almost sprang into his arms.

“This lady confides herself to my escort you see,” he said, coolly, “therefore your responsibility is at an end.”

“What’s the meaning of this,” stammered Legrange, pale with anger. “Where is Wilson?”

“You will find him somewhere near a large heap of mud, some hundred yards in the direction we have just come from,” said Arthur, composedly, arranging Miss Ashford’s shawl for her; “I advise you to go and pick him up, we have no further need of the carriage.”

“What do you mean?”

“Only that he objected to give up the reins to me, and a heap of mud being conveniently near I took the liberty of knocking him into it, which he richly deserved—though far less than his master.”

And deigning no further reply, Arthur gave Edith his arm, and crossing the road put her into

the first cab that passed them, gave the driver the needful direction and got in himself.

She was pale and trembling, and when she tried to thank him burst into tears.

"There is no occasion for thanks, Miss Ashford," Arthur said, lightly, affecting not to notice her excitement, "or rather they should be on my side, for I am heavily indebted to you."

"To me?"

"Yes, for your kindness to Nellie Yempson. I assure you, Miss Ashford, I have heard such wonderful accounts of you from her, that I am rather afraid of you than otherwise."

Edith Ashford did not fail to appreciate the delicacy which prompted Arthur, by speaking lightly, to make her position less painful to her.

She tried to thank him, though her nerves were too unstrung for her to speak in any connected fashion, but Arthur's strength and gentleness touched her deeply, and she began to think it was

not hard for her, after the night's experience to understand the child's reverence for him.

The drive was a short one; but when she reached home Edith had sufficiently recovered to say—

“I cannot thank you properly for your noble conduct to-night, sir—perhaps on some future occasion I may be able to express my gratitude better.”

Arthur again assured her no thanks were needful, and so they parted.

But the intimacy so strangely begun was not to end here.

CHAPTER VI.

"Gobrias—

Something unkindly she does take it, sir,
To have her husband chosen to her hands.

Arbaces—

Why, Gobrias, let her. I must have her know
My will and not her own must govern her."

Beaumont and Fletcher.

THERE was consternation in the house of Horace Arvale, for that gentleman's wife had declared—not once, but many times—that her daughter was mad; and (doubtless by way of showing her the calm self-control of a well-regulated mind,) had been in a violent temper, and kept a certain electric atmosphere (heavily

charged with irritation and annoyance) agitating the household for two days and a half.

Blanche's lunacy is easily explained.

A certain Mr. Thomas Scrump, a wealthy stockbroker with a figure not suggestive of ascetic diet, and a bald head as highly polished as the letters of Lord Chesterfield, had asked Blanche to be his wife, and she had very firmly declined the honour. Mrs. Arvale could have forgiven her daughter much, she said (enumerating various crimes there was not the slightest danger of her committing,) but such a deed as this was, she left it to be generally inferred, too base for the tenderness of angels to pardon.

"What is to become of you?" she enquired, indignantly, "you needn't fancy anyone else will want to marry you."

Poor little Blanche smiled and thought of Ernest Cradley, but she said nothing.

"What possible objection could you have to him," said Mrs. Arvale, for the thirtieth time on the most moderate computation.

Blanche meekly suggested that there was a difference of forty years in their respective ages.

“And a very excellent difference too,” said her mother, “a girl ought to marry a man she can respect, and how’s she to do that if he’s a young man?”

“But, mamma,” pleaded Blanche, “Mr. Scrump is a very excellent man I’ve no doubt, but he’s much older than papa in his ways as well as his years. I am sure I never could love him.”

This was treading on dangerous ground. Most people have their antipathies, and Mrs. Arvale was not exceptional in this regard. The one she hated above all things, was that state of heart and mind, concerning which so much has been thought and dreamed—the heart clinging which poets and other triflers, who hold the mad faith that there are powers in the world eluding chemical analysis—have expressed by the wondrous monosyllable love: she almost screamed at the offensive expression.

“Don’t talk to me about love,” she cried, “you are to love your mother and father of course, but it’s immodest to talk about loving men. You don’t hate Mr. Scrump do you?”

“No mamma.”

“Then why did you refuse him? A man with a position like his, why he has five thousand a year, and is a churchwarden too; but you have no regard either for religion or society.”

This was too much for Maud’s gravity; she had been standing by silently, not wishing to prolong the discussion, but at the last sentence her low peal of musical laughter rang out in unrestrained merriment.

“What’s the matter?” said Mrs. Arvale sharply, “I see nothing to laugh at.”

Maud turned to Blanche and said with a calmness that drove Mrs. Arvale to the verge of frenzy—

“How can you be so foolish, Blanche? don’t you see the force of your mother’s reasoning, and

see that you and Mr. Scrump are exactly fitted for each other?"

Mrs. Arvale looked angrily at Maud to detect a lurking smile of irony in her face, but her features were immovable.

"Consider, Blanche," she said gravely, "the justice of your mother's last remark—a churchwarden in a good position. Carlyle himself would worship such a hero. I consider your mind extremely carnal at present, but Mr. Scrump would change all that. For instance if you wanted a set of diamonds, he could either demonstrate the sinfulness of the desire, or write you a cheque for the amount required. Then I never can persuade you to study history, or awake in you a proper enthusiasm for art. Mr. Scrump could give you the country's history from personal experience from the beginning of the nineteenth century, and if you asked him to get you some fine pictures I daresay he'd buy you all the sign-boards in London."

This speech had the desired effect, it diverted Mrs. Arvale's anger for a moment from Blanche to Maud, who was far better able to stand it. Blanche took the opportunity to leave the room ; Maud who was angry with Mrs. Arvale for making Blanche cry, and took a wicked delight in tormenting her, stayed behind and gave utterance to such horrifying sentiments, and such innocent sarcasm, that Mrs. Arvale was utterly vanquished and discomfited, so she retired from the unequal contest, and left Maud in undisputed possession of the field.

Maud waited till she heard Mrs. Arvale slam the door of the library, (whither she had gone for a skirmish with her husband) and then ran upstairs to Blanchie's room, where she found her as she expected, crying bitterly.

"Don't cry, Blanchie," said Maud, as gently as though she had been talking to a frightened child, "be a woman for love's sake."

"It is so hard," sobbed poor Blanche, "and I

dread what they will say when they get Ernest's letter."

"What letter?"

"I haven't had time to tell you yet, Maud, but I saw him for a moment this morning, and he showed me a letter for papa that he was just going to send. It will be here by the last post to-night."

"Which is due in five minutes," said Maud. "I am glad he has written; but suppose it is not well received here, which I'm afraid is not unlikely to be the case, are you brave enough to face the worst?"

"I will run away with him if they are cruel," said Blanche, passionately. "I will not be treated like a child."

"No, Blanchie, you musn't talk like that. Endurance is a nobler proof of love than spasmodic sacrifice. Besides, things are not so desperate as to require that. My guardian might for aught you know consent to the idea of your engagement."

"That is impossible," said Blanche, hopelessly.

"I think otherwise," replied Maud. "Mr. Arvale always sits up late now, looking over business papers; I will go down to the library when every one has gone to bed, and see if I can't coax him into acquiescence."

"What a ministering angel you are, Maud," said Blanche, gratefully.

"Your mother did not consider so a few minutes ago," laughed Maud. "She regarded me as a spirit of a more sombre tint, and expressed the idea rather forcibly. Do you know I think she showed more penetration than her daughter? It is so exquisitely delightful to be wicked sometimes—don't look shocked, Blanchie, that is an Article of Feeling not an Article of Faith—my feelings were always erratic you know, and they spoiled me in dear old Elverley."

Maud rattled on lightly, in this fashion till she made Blanche smile through her tears, and then led her on through such a maze of delicious

nonsense that she laughed outright. It was of no use being sorrowful, and in Maud's presence it became an impossibility.

"And now," said Maud, glancing at her watch, "as it's half-past eleven, and all the household except my guardian are in bed, I'll go down stairs and plead with him. It's rather tragical to intrude upon his midnight meditations in this fashion. What a pity it is you don't play better Blanche, a little slow music would greatly heighten the dramatic effect."

"Nothing would heighten the effect of your face to-night, Maud," said Blanche, lovingly, "you are always beautiful, but when your eyes have that resolute light in them, you are a queen and irresistible, and though you are pretending to joke about this, your face is so determined that —"

"You are a wicked little flatterer," interrupted Maud, stopping further speech by a kiss, (a demagogue would have left off talking for such a

cause). "Good night darling, and keep a brave heart always."

And so saying she glided noiselessly down stairs and entered the library, where in the midst of numerous scattered papers, Horace Arvale sat alone.

He was not writing, but moodily watching the fire. Maud's light step did not break the reverie, and she hesitated whether to disturb him or not.

But in a minute or two he glanced up and started at the sight of Maud, he looked at her strangely as though her face were the unexpected sequel to the fancies suggested by the fire.

"Is anything wrong?" he said.

"Nothing whatever," replied Maud, "but I wish to have a few minutes' conversation with you, Mr. Arvale, about Blanchie."

He placed a chair for her, and leaning back in his own composed himself to listen.

"Have you received a letter from Mr. Ernest Cradley?" said Maud, going straight to the point.

“ Yes,” replied Mr. Arvale, passing her a letter as he spoke, “ there it is, you can read it if you like.”

Maud did so with great satisfaction, it was written in a straightforward manly way, stating his love for Blanche Arvale, and asking her father’s consent to their becoming engaged.

“ When are you going to reply to that?” said Maud, having finished the letter.

“ I have already done so.”

“ But you have not posted your reply yet,” answered Maud, “ may I see that too?”

Mr. Arvale seemed rather more unwilling to consent to this, but he passed his answer and watched her face as she read it.

She was not long in doing so, for in about two minutes she threw the paper impatiently down.

“ You don’t like it?” he said interrogatively.

“ No,” answered Maud candidly, “ I do not like it. Any comparison between Mr. Cradley’s letter, and your answer to it is to your

disadvantage. What has he done that you should write to him in this curt fashion?"

"He is only a drawing-master," said Mr. Arvale, "and his position is a poor one. You see he says in his letter that his income is rather more than three hundred a year at present, and in three years it may be five hundred. In what style could he live on that?"

"I don't see that 'style' is a necessity of life," replied Maud warmly, "my dear father never had so large an income as five hundred a year. And now that I have been some time in London, moving in what some idiot baptized good society, I can't say that my reverence for money has increased, or that the people I meet now seem any happier or any better for it. As for your sneer at Mr. Cradley's being a drawing-master, that is not worthy of you. He is a gentleman both by birth and education, and I honour him for entering a profession in which he has already distinguished himself, instead of living in a

hollow false way upon his father's reputation."

"But supposing they were to be married—he and Blanche, how could they live?"

"They'd find it very difficult to do so, if they made the least attempt at 'style,' but why should they, Blanche doesn't care for it—and if you married her to a rich man like that old nightmare you brought down the other day——"

"Whom do you mean?" enquired Mr. Arvale, rather at a loss to recognise any one by that description.

"Mr. Scrump, of course," said Maud, laughing. "I don't wonder that you come home depressed from the City if you have many friends of that description. I never was so bored in my life as the evening he came down here to dinner. He sat between Blanche and me, and pitying poor Blanche I tried to come to the rescue and make myself agreeable. So I screamed fifteen jokes at him—if he had choked himself with laughter I would have strewed flowers on his

grave—if the faintest, the ghastliest smile had played upon his face I might have forgiven him ; but he only shook his head and said he thought the Archbishop of Canterbury would like my views. Deafness and stupidity combined had made him fancy I was talking theology.”

Horace Arvale laughed at this, for Maud had an irresistible way of telling a story; she enjoyed it herself so intensely and her laughter was so musical that Mr. Scrump’s obtuseness appeared the more extraordinary.

“ Well,” continued Maud, who had purposely digressed to put her guardian in a better humour, “ suppose you had married Blanche to Mr. Scrump, the poor child would have been miserable with all her wealth, and if her husband had the good sense to die, (which from my experience of him I think unlikely,) she would have borne the agonies of bereavement with touching resignation.”

“ All this Maud,” said Mr. Arvale, smiling,

“because he failed to see the point of your fifteen jokes.”

“No,” said Maud, quickly, “I say all this because attempts were made to coerce Blanche into marrying him, and to me the idea of a woman marrying a man whom she does not love because he happens to possess the accident of wealth is utterly repulsive.”

“It was not my wish that she should marry him unless she liked,” said Mr. Arvale.

“No,” answered Maud, and there was no laughter in her eyes now, but an earnestness that fascinated Horace Arvale, “I admit it, but what are you doing now? You are acting entirely irrespective of Blanche’s feelings. She loves Mr. Cradley, not with a silly school-girl’s fancy, but with a woman’s love—if she marries anyone else her marriage vows will be a lie.”

Horace Arvale hesitated; in Maud’s presence he was quite unlike his usual self, and the ordinary axioms of worldly prudence he was in the habit

of accepting died upon his lips. They passed as current coin among his every-day acquaintances, but he knew that Maud would instantly reject them as counterfeit.

“What do you advise?” he said, after a pause, “You talk about her love not being a silly school-girl’s fancy. How am I to know that?”

“Put them to any test you like. Let them promise never to see each other for a year—two years if you like—while you on the other hand consent to their marriage at the end of that time, if they are still constant to each other. You did something very much like that once before when no one wanted you to do so, why can’t you do it again when there would be good reason for it?”

Horace Arvale winced slightly at this allusion to Arthur Calverley, but after a few minutes’ consideration he said—

“You are right Maud in this, as you generally are in other things, I will make some such arrangement as you suggest. There you see, I

tear up the letter I wrote and throw it in the fire. What an absurd delusion it was to draw the witches as ugly as old crows, the real witches are girls with eyes and hair like yours, and with voices like the Syrens. It's a fortunate thing you generally use your power for good, for in whatever cause you're enlisted there's no resisting you."

"It's something new to hear you play the courtier, Mr. Arvale," said Maud, highly delighted at the success of her pleading.

"No," answered her companion, sadly, "I am no courtier—it is so long since I used the language of compliment, that I have forgotten the art."

He uttered the common-place words so sadly that Maud, who had held out her hand to him, and was about to say good night, suddenly changed her mind and said in her quick impulsive way.—

"Forgive me Mr. Arvale if my words wound

you, but I have sometimes fancied there is some secret that causes you sorrow and anxiety which you hide from everyone. If this is so, and I am almost sure it is, why will you not tell it to me? It is possible I might lighten it."

He made no reply, but sat watching the fire whose embers were fast growing faint and dull.

"It may seem presumptuous in me," continued Maud, "to talk like this—to fancy that I who am so young and inexperienced could give you any help or counsel, but we women have some power to comfort by our sympathy sometimes, and you have been very kind to me."

Still he sat with his face averted and made no reply. Maud waited for two or three minutes for some word of denial or confidence, but in vain.

"Good night Mr. Arvale," she said holding out her hand once more, "you will forgive me for speaking like this, I am certain."

He turned round now, and she saw to her astonishment that his eyes were full of tears.

“ I have a secret,” he said, hoarsely, “ a secret that is eating my heart away, but I cannot tell it you.”

“ Why not ? ” she answered earnestly, “ you were my father’s dearest friend—you loved my mother as men rarely love. In the name of your dead friend and your dead love—I ask you if I can help you in any way, not to ward me off.”

“ If you could comfort me,” he said sadly, “ I am not worthy of your lightest look of pity, but you cannot do that I declare. But I will ask you to promise one thing.”

“ What is it ? ”

“ That if ever the time comes when you despise me —— ”

“ That time will never come,” she said firmly.

“ Well, then—when every one else despises me, that time may come at all events—promise me that *then* you will remember this evening, and believe that I was touched deeply by your gentleness; that I yearned as your mother’s soul

seemed to speak in your beautiful eyes—to be something better than the man I am — and though the thought is impossible and will die as the ashes in that fire have done, that I will be grateful for your words until the day I die.”

“That I promise,” she said, softly, “come what may I will believe that.”

“God bless you, darling ; you have a royal heart, and are true to plighted faith as God’s bright angels. One word more, we part to-night from this subject for ever. Before you go, may I kiss you?”

She put up her lips to his as though it were indeed a last farewell, and went upstairs thoughtfully to her own room ; having first comforted Blanche with the news of her success.

What was Horace Arvale’s secret ? She could not tell, and tried conjecture after conjecture in vain. There is no work a true woman loves more deeply than redeeming lives from ruin ; but here her hand had been outstretched in vain, and she

thought of this man with his ruined possibilities for good, his keen susceptibilities and his despair for the future, as one thinks of a weak swimmer who is being carried by a pitiless current into rapid waters, where a giant's strength would be in vain.



CHAPTER VII.

Lotty.—"Zounds ! Sir, but I am discomposed and will be discomposed. To be treated thus ! Who am I ? Was it for this I have been dreaded both by ins and outs ? Have I been libelled in the *Gazetteer*, and praised in the *St. James's* ? Have I been chaired at *Wildman's*, and a speaker at *Merchant Taylor's Hall* ? Have I had my hand to addresses, and my head in the print-shops ; and talk to me of suspects ?"

Oliver Goldsmith.

IT was no light undertaking, no easy enterprise to the accomplishment of which Arthur devoted the noblest energies of his mind, and consecrated the highest powers of his life. He did not belong to that sanguine class of politicians

who fancy the salvation of society can be accomplished by a vote of the majority in the House of Commons, or class grievances swept away by leading articles. He recognised fully that lasting reform is slow and gradual in its movements, and that the great revolutionary measures, that have convulsed society, crowding into a few days an era of thought and action, have merely been the inevitable assertion of forces silently maturing through years of unrecognised labour, and the birth pangs of centuries of like toil under different aspects.

With these thoughts he espoused the cause of the poor, working and writing constantly in their behalf. Our young fancies have such a boundless faith in our possibility to achieve; if there is wrong in the world we can redress it, if there is tyranny it can be speedily crushed, if there is misery we can sweep it away, and dreaming after this beautiful foolish fashion we enter on a crusade against evil, as though it were a chivalrous

tournament, needing only high souled valour, a strong hand and a well directed lance to ensure us victory, and a laurel-wreath from the hand of our spirit's queen.

But Arthur had learnt, young as he was, a deeper thought of work than this—the thought the universe is never tired of teaching—the glory of patient labour. For all great things are slow in their development, and nothing has hindered human progress, more than the mad haste that would have enterprise always winged, and reform always destructive.

But the one need of the world is earnest work, and true effort nobly put forth is never fruitless. The flower withers or is 'trampled beneath the wild tread of a destructive army, but who can tell the work it accomplished? Who can say what fragrance it had distilled, what seeds it had scattered, or how it's leaves enriched the earth in death!

So Arthur worked on patiently and bravely,

not daunted if little outward effect crowned his work, Maud's fair face and woman's heart had stirred all that was truest in him into life, and he who works for high ends is careless of reward.

He continued to write much on the subject, to suggest many things that could and must be done to lessen the burden of the poor. This brought him a visible harvest in the form of abuse from reformers who wanted the world put right according to their own systems, and from the large class of thinkers who regard earnestness as synonymous with fanaticism, and whose panacea for all evil is to let it alone.

But his deeper work lay in action not speech. Into poor homes he brought new light and comfort, helping them to help themselves — aiding a struggling mind here and crushing a narrow prejudice there; now ministering to the wants of people ill or hungry, now awakening larger sympathies in men trained by demagogues and agitators to be jealous of all classes save their

own. Such labour does not publish abroad its usefulness; but the influence of quiet work is simply incalculable in a world of jarring discord and angry strife.

“If every other effort of mine proves useless, I shall at least have saved one child from poverty and probable shame,” he said to himself; and often when he was wearied and lonely he would go and see little Nellie Yempson, and learn light-heartedness from her.

It was his custom to call at the house in Kensington once every week, but not oftener; so that some days elapsed between the night when he rescued Edith Ashford, and his next visit to the house where she lived.

When he did call Nellie was in the drawing-room having her music lesson, but hearing his knock came bounding downstairs to meet him.

Edith Ashford came downstairs too, to say a grateful word for his brave conduct.

It was not easy to do this, and the young actress, ordinarily so self-possessed, was at first nervous and rather ill at ease, but Arthur's chivalrous respect soon reassured her; he turned the conversation to more general topics—talked of music and the drama, of Charlie Alcester's tragedy and the character of Magdalena, till she grew animated also, and fascinated by his words began to talk earnestly too.

Little Nellie Yempson sat beside them listening to every word they said, with as deep an interest as though she perfectly understood them. This had been the child's dream for weeks past, to bring together the two people she cared most for in all the world, and for them (this she regarded as an inevitable sequence) instantly to love each other.

"Don't you think he's wonderful, Miss Edith," she asked eagerly when he had gone.

"You do, I know," replied Edith not finding the question very easy to answer, "and you have

known him longer than I. Why is he wonderful Nellie? you can tell me that."

This needed reflection; after pondering over it in her childish way for a few minutes, Nellie replied—

"Because he knows everything, and can do anything, and he's strong—oh, so strong—you can't think, and yet he's always kind, and he plays hide-and-seek and tells me stories."

"You've made out a strong case, Nellie," said Edith smiling, at this long list of varied accomplishments, "finish this scale now, and that will do for to-day."

Nellie's small fingers accomplished the musical feat required with considerable dexterity, and having been praised and kissed, she walked slowly towards the door.

But evidently there was something further she wished to say, for she stopped at the window and looked wistfully down at the street below where the rain was falling heavily, and shining

umbrellas were hoisted aloft, by struggling pedestrians like the banners of a falling cause.

"Miss Edith," said Nellie, after a few moments hesitation, "what's the name of that country you told me about where you lived when you were a little girl?"

"Italy," said Edith, stroking the child's golden hair.

"And you told me, didn't you, that it's bright and warm there, not wet and miserable like that—and that there are all kinds of beautiful things there that I've never seen—rivers, and mountains, and flowers, and fruits?"

"Yes," said Edith, wondering at Nellie's eagerness, "I told you all that."

"Then don't you think, Miss Edith," said the child, with the breathlessness that commonly accompanies the utterance of a great thought, "that it would be lovely for us all—you and Mr. Arthur, and I, and your piano, all to go and live in Italy, and we'd play with flowers, and butterflies, and listen to you sing all day long."

Edith coloured slightly and laughed rather nervously, but she evaded the child's questioning as well as she could, and sent her downstairs to Sarah.

But from that day she looked forward to Arthur's weekly visits as eagerly as Nellie Yempson herself, and often as she studied some part for her next appearance on the stage, the book would fall unheeded upon her knee, while a smile would play upon her rosy lips as though the poetry had awakened some sweet association, and carried her into the dream-world of enchanted reverie.

She never analysed her own feelings, she never admitted her love for Arthur even to herself, but she knew that when he came he opened a new world for her, and that the actual world never seemed so dark and dreary as when he had gone, and she knew she would not see him for a week.

Those visits were very unlike the ordinary intercourse of society. Sarah on these occasions

would sit by the fire, knitting placidly, with a serene unconsciousness of surroundings, while Nellie would sit on a hassock at the feet, either of Arthur or Edith, watching their faces as they talked, and often thinking that her Italian project would come true after all.

And Edith Ashford always postponed reflection, surrendering herself to the fascination of this new strange delight, which made life seem so beautiful. "He does not care for me," she would sometimes think sadly, but she put the thought away from her, why should she mar present gladness by anticipation of a sorrowful future? and so she studied his favourite songs, played the works of his favourite composers, and thought no new triumph of her art complete, unless his voice had ratified the general approval.

Yet so perfectly did she hide her feelings that Arthur had not the slightest suspicion of them. A man with less penetration yet more conceit than he possessed, would have foreseen that this

was the almost inevitable result of an intimacy like theirs, but he did not entertain the idea seriously for one moment ; these interviews grew naturally out of a friendship which he had not sought ; he could not leave off visiting his little Raven, or remove her from the house at Kensington without positive rudeness and great personal inconvenience : “ besides,” he argued to himself, “ she lives in a continual triumph, admiration is the very air she breathes—I should be a fool if I thought her likely to fall in love with me :” and so he had dismissed the thought as absurd, and had never considered the matter again.

He was extremely guarded, however, in his bearing towards the young actress, treating her with chivalrous deference as he treated all women, but abstaining as completely from any temptation to flirt as though she had been guarded by a grim battalion of duennas. He enjoyed her society as one always enjoys the society of a

woman who is beautiful, accomplished and young. She interested him too by her passionate enthusiasm for the arts, which were fast making her name renowned, by the intensity of feeling she threw into every word she said, and by the resemblance he fancied he saw in her to Maud.

To one phase of Maud's character that is to say. The two girls were nearly of the same age, both were beautiful in their different ways, and both were intense and passionate in feeling ; but there the resemblance ended. Maud's varied culture and enthusiastic love of laughter balanced and disciplined the sterner qualities in her disposition. "I'm an incarnate paradox," she would say sometimes ; but in Edith Ashford's nature the lighter traits were altogether wanting.

And so while Maud was consoling poor little Blanche at the separation from Ernest Cradley, (who had received his sentence of two years' banishment, with the hope of Blanche's hand at the end,) while Maud was petting Blanche,

teasing Mrs. Arvale, and fascinating everybody ; while Arthur was working hard day and night, and Edith Ashford's love was daily becoming more despotically the king of her world of thought and feeling, the winter passed away—the spring, the summer, and the autumn came and went—and Arthur welcomed the return of the cold days and long nights gladly, as he thought of the June sunshine that was only seven months distant now, and would bring with it the end of his enforced separation from Maud, and the glorious reward of his patience and his toil.

He was not rich, but his writings, sketches, translations and compilations had gained for him a fair pecuniary reward, and he had arrived at the end he had set before him—to attain a position in which he could be altogether independent of Maud's fortune.

But he had strained every faculty he possessed to the utmost for the accomplishment of another work, the thought of Maud in this, as in his

labours for social ends, guiding and inspiring him.

This was the composition of a work of fiction, and often, when wearied out with thoughts of the misery and want he could do so little to alleviate, he would turn to his book, and find in this brighter and more hopeful work, solace and relief.

For though the events of the story he wrote happened in a different age, and the scenes lay sometimes in other countries, the plan of the book expressed the experience of his own life—the power of inspiration dwelling in true-hearted womanhood, the strength of a woman's hand to rouse a man from apathy and indifference, to reveal his highest possibilities to him, and to lead him on to high achievements, and to noble aims.

And the heroine of his fancy was the heroine of his life. He taxed his utmost powers to portray Maud's character—her steadfastness hidden under a winning playfulness, her fascinating

contradictions of heart and mind, her nature wayward and erratic on the surface, but earnest and true in its profound depths.

In whatever point his book failed, he succeeded here. He accomplished his design, not by minutely describing her peculiar beauty, or repeating her favorite tricks of phrase, but by delineating a heroine under totally different circumstances to Maud, and acting in quite a different way, but actuated by similar impulses guided by like thoughts, and winning love in like fashion.

And in the absence of the real Maud, he found strange gladness in writing and thinking about the *Faerie Queene* of his story, and in tracing the delicious nonsense of Maud's conversation, the delicate perceptions of her mind, the brave and beautiful tenderness of her heart, under circumstances purely imaginary.

One night he had just taken up his pen to resume the course of his story, when he was interrupted by a rather harsh voice saying—

“ Mr. Calverley, I think ? ”

The speaker was a tall ghostly looking man with very long black hair and a somewhat cadaverous face, legs like a race-horse, and a neck like a giraffe.

Arthur viewed the ungainly figure with some annoyance, he looked like a bore, and Arthur wanted to work, however he said courteously—

“ That is my name. I have not the pleasure of knowing yours.”

The man frowned like a bandit in melo-drama, then fumbled in his pocket and produced a card. It was rather dirty like his hands and his linen, but the letters printed upon it were in large Roman capitals, and Arthur easily deciphered the inscription, which consisted of one word—

S C R O D G E .

Arthur looked at his visitor for an explanation.

“ My card, sir,” said that interesting individual.

“ Oh,” said Arthur, not feeling sure of his companion’s sanity, “ perhaps, Mr. Scrodge,

you'll inform me to what I am indebted for the honour of this visit."

"A Deed of Blood, by Scrodge," said the owner of that euphonious name, impressively.

"If you have anything to say to me," said Arthur (greatly bored by this mysterious visitor, and strongly suspecting that his madness had no sublimer cause than brandy) "perhaps you'll have the kindness to say it. My time is precious, and your remarks remind me of the colloquy of madmen, in the 'Duchess of Malfi.'"

"Genius is always considered madness," said Mr. Scrodge, disdainfully, "I am a genius, sir."

"I am sorry to hear it," said Arthur, composedly.

"Sorry, sir?" echoed the other.

"You have a grievance of some kind," returned Arthur, "at least I imagine so, and the genius of which you have spoken appears to make you uncomfortable, so I expressed a polite regret thereat. Is anything else the matter?"

“ Yes, sir,” replied the infuriated Scrodge, “ much is the matter—you are the matter—this is the matter.”

With which extraordinary observation he produced a copy of the latest number of the ‘ London Review,’ and turning to the part containing criticisms on current literature, the enraged Scrodge pointed to the heading of one column.

“ ‘ A DEED OF BLOOD.’ By Scrodge.

Luffing and Co., London, 3 vols.”

“ Now, sir, do you understand the object of my visit. ‘ A Deed of Blood.’ That’s *mine*, sir. ‘ By Scrodge,’ that’s *me*, sir. Reviewed unfavourably, that’s *you*, sir,” and with these words the excited author brandished a riding whip violently in the air after the manner theatrical savages employ their tomahawks.

“ Oh,” said Arthur, coolly, “ I comprehend the situation now, you object to my criticism of your book, and have come to expostulate with me on the subject, but as your riding whip is decidedly

irrelevant, permit me to relieve you of it.'

With which polite suggestion Arthur wrested the riding whip from his hands, and very deliberately threw it out of the window.

Having taken this preliminary step towards a quiet discussion, he observed, handing his visitor a chair, "I shall be happy to hear any remarks you may wish to make. But I must stipulate that your behaviour be that of an ordinary Christian."

Mr. Scrodge, much discomfited by so unexpected a reception, murmured the sanguinary title of his book, and asked Arthur faintly what he meant.

"Simply that no one but a lunatic or bandit would come into a critic's rooms in this ferocious fashion. 'A Deed of Blood' is an intensely stupid novel and I have no wish to witness or to assist a dramatic version of it. At the same time I may be compelled to accelerate your retirement by a kick, if you can't behave in a saner fashion."

Mr. Scrodge had pictured to himself a cowering critic, crushed by his wrath; and this reception was so disconcerting that he sank into a chair and said in quite an altered voice—

“I think you have been hard upon me, sir.”

“If you can show me any phrase in the review that is unjust I will withdraw it, and publish a full apology besides,” said Arthur.

“It isn’t so much any particular phrase I object to, as the whole article,” was the reply.

“It is severe I admit,” returned Arthur, “but there is not a single thoughtless or flippant phrase in the article. For the school of criticism that attempts to demonstrate the height of its standard by indiscriminate censure, I have not the shadow of an excuse. Few things are harder than the common fate of an artist, who toils long and conscientiously to express a true thought of whatever nature to the world. It is sure to be attacked, and aspersed, but I have never joined in such condemnation——”

Mr. Scrodge made a gesture of dissent.

"I repeat," said Arthur, "that I have attacked no work of that description. I have never condemned a book merely because it was faulty, or even because it was weak, if I could trace in it any struggling after what was right and good. For art however imperfect I have a wide tolerance, but I do not consider criminal novels in the light of art at all."

"What do you consider them then?"

"As specimens—good or otherwise—of literary cookery; and on behalf of the mental digestions writers of this class are constantly ruining, I protest against so unpalatable an article as the one you served up under the agreeable title of 'A Deed of Blood.'"

Mr. Scrodge gazed at the ceiling in utter bewilderment, as who should say—"And this is genius, this the reward one earns for being wiser than the rest of mankind."

"Cookery," he repeated, faintly.

“Yes,” said Arthur, decidedly, “I call it cookery. The recipe for a criminal novel appears to be something like this. Take a murder, or a duel (lady writers generally prefer more unmentionable crimes, such as bigamy or adultery, but this is optional), flavour strongly with mystery, vulgarity and slang, cook it to the greatest possible heat and serve it up for general consumption in three volumes.”

“Don’t you think crime ought ever to be written about?” enquired his companion sullenly.

“Certainly it may be written of occasionally, our great writers have done so, but in a very different fashion to you. If you attempted any analysis of thought and feeling such events awaken—if you evolved any kind of teaching from the subject, it would be different, though it needs a masterly touch to mould materials of that description, into a work of high art, and as an exclusive theme crime is sickening, but it is idle to

“speak of ideal criminal stories, for as I said before you make no attempt at art at all.”

“What do we do then?”

“You dress up the lives of vagabonds and scoundrels, so as to make them appear attractive, you leave it to be generally inferred that the meaning of life is best taught by the annals of the police courts, you sacrifice everything to the idea of awakening an unhealthy and excited interest, and by way of conciliating offended decency, you tack on a moral at the end which is negatived by the whole story.”

“What are we to write about then?”

“About anything that affects the mind or heart of humanity. And you and your brothers and sisters in sensational lore, would do well to lay this to heart that all art is teaching.”

“Teaching,” echoed Mr. Scrodge in utter astonishment.

“Yes teaching, I don’t mean by tacking on a reflective sentence like the morals at the end of

Æsop's fables, or instruction, after the manner of Sunday School lesson books, but by the enunciation of a truth."

"A new truth?"

"Not necessarily, or the circle of artists would be pitifully small, but truth will always bear repetition. A man playing Beethoven's Sonatas is doing nothing wonderful or original, but he is revealing beauty to men or reminding them of it, and therefore I recognise in him an artist and a worker, and will give him according to his ability my gratitude and reverence."

"And is there no teaching in my book, sir?" enquired the offended author, rising.

"I should be glad to learn it," said Arthur, "if it is anything else but the astounding principle that murder, felony, and adultery are natural and pleasing episodes in a hero's life. Have you succeeded in discovering anything deeper in your book, Mr. Scrodge?"

"Sir," said that gentleman impressively, with

something like the ghost of his former manner, “you have proved by this interview your inability to recognise true genius, and your gross ignorance of art; therefore I will not condescend to reply.”

With which sublime farewell Mr. Scrodge took his departure.

CHAPTER VIII.

Edgar.—"Whence had you that chain?"

Alice.—"It was my mother's once, and round my neck
She clasped it, but an hour before she died."

"I AM afraid he will not be here this evening,
Nellie."

"Oh yes he will, Miss Edith, it's only ten minutes past his usual time, and he never breaks his promise."

Edith and Nellie were standing in the drawing-room by the window looking rather anxiously for Arthur's arrival. Edith was slowly putting on her gloves for it was almost time for her to

start for the theatre, where she was to act that night, and Sarah who always appeared on these occasions as duenna was patiently waiting ready dressed below, but Edith felt very sorrowful at the thought of not seeing Arthur for another week and looked wistfully down the street like a disappointed child.

“It’s of no use Nellie,” she said wearily, “he won’t be here to-night.”

“Yes, here he is,” cried the child, clapping her hands as she descried his familiar figure in the distance.

Edith looked at her watch, she still had ten minutes to spare, so she would see and speak to him after all she thought, and she had just attained a fresh dramatic triumph, of which she could scarcely deem herself really possessed till his praise was also won.

So though she turned from the window not to seem anxious for his appearance, and pretended to arrange some music on the table, the thought

of the coming ten minutes made her heart beat faster and her hands tremble with excitement. It is strange to think how a few moments, in which no visible event transpires and scarcely a word perhaps is uttered, can form an epoch in life, and shine like stars through the darkness of the weary aftertime.

In a minute or two Arthur's quick step was heard upon the stairs, and he entered the room followed by Sarah, who was equipped for the purposes of escort, and carried an enormous umbrella, bearing about the same proportion to ordinary articles of that description, as an eightyone-ton gun bears to a rifle.

Arthur shook hands with Edith and kissed Nellie as usual.

"I did not expect to have the pleasure of seeing you this evening, Miss Ashford," he said.

"No," she replied, "I have not many minutes to spare."

"The cab's a waitin', Miss Hashford," observed

Sarah, "and you know how wild the manager will be if you keep him waitin'."

"All right, Sarah, I don't appear in the first scene you know."

Poor Edith did not mention that the first scene lasted about three minutes, and that she herself opened the second one.

"You are Viola to-night, are you not?" said Arthur.

"Yes," she answered; adding after a momentary pause, "I saw you at the theatre on Thursday evening."

"Yes, I was there," replied Arthur; "'Twelfth Night' is one of my favourite Shakespearean plays."

Edith waited eagerly for some further word; if he would only have praised her rendering of a single passage she would have been grateful; but he turned to Nellie Yempson in the most exasperating manner, as though the topic were exhausted.

"What did you think of the general effect of

the play?" said Edith, trying to appear unconcerned, but secretly determined to elicit his opinion even though it were unfavourable.

"I fancy few people among your audiences think of the general effect of the plays in which you act, Miss Ashford," he replied, his quiet tone divesting the words of any complimentary significance, and making them merely the utterance of a critical opinion. "The other parts were good for the most part, Malvolio especially so; but 'Twelfth Night' simply meant Viola to the majority of your audience. Everybody I meet is eloquent on the subject."

"And you," she asked eagerly, "what do you think?"

Arthur smiled. "I did not wish to play the critic," he said, "or to carp at a general verdict of praise so fairly won in many respects; but you know the privileges of old friends are to borrow umbrellas, give disagreeable advice, and express candid opinions."

“Then prove yourself a friend Mr. Calverley, and be as unmerciful as you think I deserve.”

“It would be very foolish and very presumptuous of me to adopt a censor’s tone,” he said, “in many respects I thought your acting on Thursday wonderful; in the fourth scene of the second act for example, your conception of the character was perfect, and throughout the whole play your acting was in the highest school of dramatic art, but I cannot say you presented Shakespeare’s Viola to my fancy. Now and then I caught a glimpse of Viola, in the graver scenes, but it was only an imperfect vision, and in the lighter parts I missed her altogether.”

“You do not think much of my acting I am afraid,” said Edith trying to smile.

“On the contrary I have as high an admiration for it, as any of the writers of flattering reviews upon it, I regard your acting not as talent merely but as genius, but it is genius of a peculiar and somewhat exclusive nature. Intense and passionate

feeling, whether of love or hate, of delight or agony, or mere womanly gentleness and calm, you render more remarkably than any living actress. This is high achievement, and further study will bring you fresh triumphs, but unless you lose your individuality, I cannot fancy your ever becoming the actual Viola of whom Shakespeare wrote."

"Time's up Miss," said Sarah, who had listened to the conversation with considerable impatience.

"I shall be ready in one moment Sarah," said Edith hastily buttoning the glove that had taken so long to put on. "Then do you think me incapable of representing Shakespeare's heroines?" she asked wistfully turning again to Arthur.

"No," he answered quickly. "There are some that you would achieve the highest triumph in playing. As Juliet for example, I believe you would win not merely the approval, but the

enthusiasm of the whole dramatic world, if you gave the character long and patient study."

Edith blushed as she answered—

"You are a magician I believe, Mr. Calverley, I have been studying that character for months past, and I am to appear as Juliet in a few weeks' time, but I am late as it is. Good night."

"Good night," said Arthur, taking her hand for a moment, quite unconscious of the reason why she blushed.

Little Nellie Yempson threw her arms round Edith's neck as she said good night in her impulsive childish fashion, in so doing she unclasped a gold necklace Miss Ashford wore, which fell lightly on the ground.

Arthur picked it up, and was returning it to her when he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Who gave you that necklace?" he asked her in a quick excited tone, very unlike his usual self-possessed manner.

It was a simple chain of no remarkable beauty

or value, but attached to it was a small locket, of a pattern Arthur knew too well to fail to recognise, and engraved upon it were the words *Beatrice Genari*.

“It was my mother’s necklace,” said Edith, almost as surprised at Arthur’s agitation as he himself. “Have you ever seen one like it?”

“Yes,” he answered, quickly, “is there no story connected with this locket? Believe me I am actuated by sincere motives which I will fully explain, and not by impertinent curiosity when I ask this question.”

Edith hesitated a moment, then unlocked her desk and took some papers from it.

“Yes,” she said, “there is a story connected with it. It is the tale of my mother’s life. I cannot stay another minute. I am very late as it is, but I will lend these papers to you—you will take care of them I know. They are my mother’s writing and will explain everything.”

“I will not detain you another moment,” said

Arthur, taking the papers she offered him. "I will take these home with me now, and to-morrow I will call and solve the mystery."

So Edith Ashford hurried off with Sarah, and Arthur (much to the disappointment of little Nellie Yempson, who was preparing herself for an evening of play) returned immediately to his lodgings.

He had determined not to examine these papers till he reached home and could do so leisurely, but all the way his mind was busy with conjecture as to what they might contain.

How came Edith Ashford to wear a necklace and locket the exact counterpart of those Maud had bound round his wrist! Could it be that the resemblance he had fancied he detected between them was not accidental—that they were connected by ties of close relationship? As Arthur thought of the strange coincidences of life, and the subtle mysterious power that interweaves the threads of human lives so wondrously together,

he admitted it might be so, and yet it seemed almost impossible to connect the London actress with the village queen. But his intimacy with Edith Ashford had been strange throughout, and it was not the least singular feature in the course of events, that this mystery had never been suspected by either of them, and was revealed at last, by what seemed a mere accident, the impulsive caresses of a child.

Or could it be that accident had no part in the whole intercourse, but that it had tended steadily to some great event or course of events of which this was the immediate forerunner? Arthur could think of nothing else without some such fancy as this haunting his mind.

When he reached his rooms he ran upstairs, lit the lamp, threw aside a heap of unopened letters, and taking the papers from his pocket proceeded to study their contents.

CHAPTER IX.

“ This life of ours is a wild Æolian harp of many a
joyous strain,
But under them all runs a loud perpetual wail,
as of souls in pain.”

Longfellow.

(The Golden Legend.)

THE first of the papers Arthur opened was a letter to Edith from her mother, relating to matters of small importance; the second was an Italian poem in a man's hand-writing; the third was a certificate of marriage between John Ashford and Laura Genari, and the last was the missing link in the chain of circumstances connecting

Maud and Edith, being the story of Laura Genari's life.

Arthur thought how two years and a half before he and Maud sitting together in Ralph Atherton's study, had read a similar letter, penned like this by a hand that was cold and lifeless now.

It was dated only two years before the time he saw Edith Ashford, and was as follows :

“ I write this for you Edith, that you may read my life-story when it is ended ; it is a poor record—the tale of a selfish useless life ; but it is better you should know all, and then while you are winning love and homage—by beauty and grace that I watch proudly every day, and which I know will be rarer than mine ever were—you will think gently of your mother lying beneath the long grass of an English churchyard.

“ Something tells me that this time of death and silence is not far away. If I could only breathe again the air of Italy, if I could only see

the heavy clusters of purple grapes in the old vineyards, or watch the sunbeams glittering on the blue rivers, my weak heart might beat a little longer; but in the cold Northern air I sicken, I droop, I die.

“I have never loved this England or its people; in the warm South where nature is bright always and the skies smile lovingly upon you, men and women live; here they think only of money and themselves, and the cold routine of existence they call life is not life at all. Their love is a cold compact of mere esteem, their friendship is a thought of self-interest, their religion is a creed of pitiless revenge, and their worship austere and devoid of charm or beauty.

“But it is of Italy not of England that I must write. Let me raise the veil that hides my girlhood for a moment, let me write down here what no living heart dreams of, the real meaning of my life.

“I remember little of my earliest childhood.

I have some shadowy recollection of my father, and my mother's pale patient face is before me now, but the face that I see always—in the air—in the clouds—in the fire ; dreaming and awake ; whether I am thinking of her or of other things, is the face of my sister Beatrice—my beautiful loving Trichy.

“ She was very little older than I, but I thought of her as of a mother, who was brave and gentle, ever serving me and caring nothing for herself ; child as I was I felt this, and though I tried her by a thousand ways, I loved her always.

“ Oh my gentle little Trichy, why did you not let me die rather than part from you ? If I had lived with you always the white wings of your soul might have guarded me from the world, it would have been better, a thousand times, to have been poor always—sad and weary even, if I could sob out my misery upon your breast—than my life of heartless glitter, and my coming lonely death.

“ I write wildly Edith, for the mere thought of that old time has quickened the throbbing of my heart, I cannot speak of it calmly. I cannot tell you all its details. I can but tell you the two great impulses of my life, and how they came to be.

“ I was born in a great palace on the banks of a river, where it was I never knew, but I can faintly remember the time when we were rich, and had servants to wait upon us. Beatrice often told me about those times, and she used to say that in those days my mother was bright and laughing, not as I always picture her—weary and pale.

“ But my father died and we were very very poor, often we had not enough to eat, though my mother worked hard night and day. We lived in Rome now, in one of the poorest streets of the city, and I used to envy the rich children, who lived in great houses and must—I thought—be always happy.

“ I cannot tell how long this life lasted, but my

mother grew slowly weaker and weaker. I think her heart was broken, though I used only to think then how dull it was to see her always grave and sad. But one night I came into the room where she was sitting, and found Beatrice on the ground at her feet sobbing bitterly. I could not think what was the cause, for Trichy was never naughty like I was, and she very seldom cried. ‘What is the matter?’ I asked, ‘has any one been cruel to Trichy?’

“They tried to laugh, and assured me that nothing was wrong, and my mother soothed me with her caresses.

“‘See, little one,’ she said, ‘here is a gold chain and locket for you like the one I have fastened round Trichy’s neck.’

“She clasped it round my throat as she spoke, it was a plain gold chain with a small locket attached, containing her likeness and a lock of her hair. The one she had given Beatrice was precisely the same, except for the likeness and the hair which were my father’s.

“ I remember in my childish delight at the dignity of wearing a gold chain, I forgot all about Trichy’s tears, and I went to bed that night glad and happy. But during the night while I was sleeping in my mother’s arms, Beatrice came to the bed-side and woke me. She was very pale and excited, and my mother’s hand was cold, yet I did not suspect the truth. But Beatrice took me into her own bed and told me everything—that our mother had gone to heaven to be with our Lady, and Christ, and the Blessed Angels, and that she must be my mother now, and so locked in each other’s arms we sobbed ourselves to sleep.

“ I had loved my mother, but not passionately, she was so grave and sad ; therefore the child’s easy forgetfulness of sorrow soon came to my relief. Beatrice had said she would be a mother to me, and that was enough.

“ And she kept her word. Whether she is living now or whether she is waiting to welcome

me in Heaven I cannot tell; but never have I knelt in prayer without uttering her name, and for years the cry of my heart has been to hold her in my arms a moment before I die.

“We had no friends in the world except the woman in whose house we lived, and she was poor and could do little to help us. But we two children went out into the world to seek for food almost as ignorant of its ways as the birds who did the same.

“We used to sing ballads together in the streets, and whether it was that we were so young or that we really sang sweetly, or that the people thought us pretty I know not, but they were very generous in their gifts so that we had more money than when my mother lived.

“It was an uncertain life, of course; and sometimes there would be days when we earned nothing, but the wandering thoughtless life had a strange fascination for me, I left all care to Beatrice and selfishly took all the happiness as my natural right.

“One day we had been singing outside a great house, when a lady called us in. It was a beautiful house, everything that it contained was rich and costly, and there were many servants to do the lady’s bidding. She gave us fruit, and wine, and sweetmeats; then asked me if I should like to live with her always.

“I was delighted with the idea at first, but when she told me I must part with Beatrice I was angry and told her she must be wicked to think of such a thing. So we went away and resumed the old life together.

“Oh that the past could yield but an hour from its treasury in answer to our heart’s wild cry. If but for one hour Beatrice and I could stand hand-in-hand together as once we used to do—two children with shoeless feet, happier far than the jewelled ladies of Rome—it would be better worth having than years of life like mine. But those days ended suddenly. I remember one day I had been languid and weary, and was

feeling very ill; Beatrice tended to all my wants and when we reached home it was with womanly rather than childish gentleness that she put my head upon her shoulder and hushed me to rest.

“ After that moment there comes a blank concerning which I remember nothing. When I awoke it was to find myself in a large airy room, with a doctor sitting by my bedside, and a nurse walking across the room with noiseless tread. I looked around for one familiar face, and saw none, but I was too weak yet to talk, so I shut my eyes wearily and fell asleep again.

“ Bye-and-bye as I grew stronger they told me all—that I had been very ill—that Beatrice had tried to nurse me till she feared I should die; then to save my life she had come to the lady who had offered to adopt me before and told her everything—that I had been taken from the poor lodging where we lived, and by careful nursing, and by skilful medical treatment restored, that henceforth I was to live in this beautiful house

always to ride in a carriage, and be taught all kinds of things I longed to know, to have play-things and jewels—in a word to be treated as though I were this rich lady's only child.

“ But they told me also one thing that spoilt it all—I was never to see Beatrice again.

“ I was not happy in my new life, though every one was kind and gentle to me. All that money could buy was mine, and I had always loved luxury, and hated poverty, but even Paradise would have been dreary without Beatrice to me.

“ I would have run away, indulgent as they all were if I had known where to find her, but no one knew, so I hoped and hoped for the day when I should see her once again, but it never never came.

“ The lady who had adopted me was a rich English widow named Ashford. I think if I had been her own child she could not have loved me more, but I never felt a daughter's tenderness for her. Mine is a strange nature, and it has always

been a selfish one, I know it now that it is too late. Two people there have been, Edith, beside yourself, for whose sake I would have suffered anything—for whom I would have died. Of Beatrice I have already spoken, there was one other heart to whom I gave a yet more passionate devotion, of him I will speak directly.

“We lived at Rome till I was twelve years old, then we went to Florence. Here we lived in even greater style than we had done in Rome. We had a fine house in the Piazza del Granduca, and were always giving parties and receiving guests. I had jewels and more money than I could spend, and my education was of the highest and most careful description.

“So my time passed away till I was nearly seventeen; I never forgot Beatrice, and often when the house was full of company I would turn from them all, that I might sit alone and think of my beautiful darling whom I was destined never to see on earth again.

“But just before my seventeenth birthday an event happened that turned the whole course of my life—that changed the aspect of everything, that gave me new aims and desires, and peopled my loneliness with dreams.

“How it all comes back again to my remembrance. As I write I can almost feel the soft air of the June morning when my childhood ceased and I became a woman.

“It was in the grand old Florentine cathedral that I saw him first; I had been kneeling and when I rose I saw his dark eyes fixed earnestly upon me. When matins were over I passed him in leaving the cathedral, and again our eyes met. In my confusion I dropped my rosary, he picked it up and returned it me with a graceful phrase of courtesy. When I was again at the cathedral he was there too, and very soon there sprang up an intimacy between us.

“I will not write his name here. It is enough for me to say that I loved him passionately, and

would have been his slave gladly if thereby alone I could watch his face and listen to his voice.

“ He was a poet, and very young—not more than a year or two older than I, he was poor and so we kept our love a secret.

“ This enchanted dream did not last long. A few rambles by the Arno, a few hours that I cannot think or speak of calmly even now, a few love songs that were sweet to me as the harps of angels—and then my lover died, leaving me at seventeen with no care or wish to live.

“ It was at this time that a brother-in-law of Mrs. Ashford’s, a young man of about seven-and-twenty, came to live at Florence. He admired me very much I saw, and perhaps had he come to Italy a year before he might have won my love ; now I had none to give him—it was buried in my dead hero’s grave.

“ But John Ashford loved me, and would bear with coldness, wilfulness, or indifference if he could win from me at last a kindly word or

smile. He was grave, cold and stern to others, but to me he was always yielding and submissive. It was nothing to me for my heart had grown cold and bitter through sorrow, I was miserable myself and cared little if others became so too. 'She is absolutely without heart,' I overheard Mrs. Ashford say to her brother-in-law once, 'she will play with yours till she is weary—then she will break it, and her dark eyes will shed no tears.'

"I laughed secretly at her words; they were true enough, for I never meant to marry him. It was pleasant to have him always at my feet reverential and obedient, but if he prayed for love it was useless; my power for loving had gone from me for ever.

"But when he asked me to be his wife I hesitated. I was weary of my present life—I longed for change—he was rich and would give me anything I asked—a life of gaiety, of glitter, and of homage seemed the best the world could give me

now, so at last I consented and we were married.

“ I hurry over this part of my story—if my tears could blot it out, it should be effaced from my remembrance for ever. The woman who marries without love acts falsely and basely. I had done this and had to reap the bitter harvest.

“ We were not happy together. He was weary very soon of my coldness and caprice, he became distrustful of me, and would often reproach me sternly till I almost grew to hate him.

“ But about a year after my marriage you were born Edith, and then I knew my heart had not lost all power to love. From that time I lived a dual existence—to you I was loving and gentle, always to the rest of the world I was indifferent and heartless as ever.

“ My husband, tired of the dreariness of home, sought enjoyment elsewhere. He found it, or thought he found it in gambling, and night after night he spent in the delirious excitement of hazarding large sums of money.

“ At first he won, then after a few alternate gains and losses, fortune went steadily against him, he doubled the stakes and lost again.

“ In this way his large fortune was squandered. It was on the eve of ruin that he was suddenly taken ill, and after a short illness died, leaving me without a penny in the world.

“ And now for the first time I felt all I had done. False to the memory of my first and only love; false to every marriage vow but that of chastity; false to my womanhood in my cold disregard of everything but self; false to the friends to whom I should have been most grateful—my misery was made keener by the bitter knowledge that I had deserved it all.

“ Among my husband's papers I found a letter from an English friend, describing a young Italian lady whom he had seen at an evening party, whose face reminded the writer he said ‘of John Ashford's wife.’ He went on to say—‘I had no opportunity to speak to her, but I learnt

by accident that the young beauty was an Italian, and that her name was Beatrice Genari.'

"Then Beatrice was in England, and my husband had never told me. Perhaps he had dreaded my importunate entreaties that we should go there; perhaps he was not sorry to punish me for my unwifely conduct; perhaps he had really intended bye and bye to let me know about it, but postponed it till the luck of cards and dice should change—however this might be he had kept the secret, and I learnt it now for the first time.

"I determined to go to England and find Beatrice out. If I could lay my head again upon her bosom and tell her all that I had done and suffered, she would forgive and pity me; and with her help I might build a new and better life on the ruins of the old. Yes, at any cost—at any sacrifice—I must go to England.

"But how? I had neither money nor friends, for I had quarrelled with Mrs. Ashford soon after

my marriage. She had complained of my bearing towards my husband, and I—proud and ungrateful always—had resented this. I had not spoken to her for years, but love can conquer even pride and I determined to go to her for help.

“It cost a great struggle to make this resolve, but the thought of Beatrice overcame everything, and I stood before Mrs. Ashford once again.

“But when I saw how she had changed and how sad her face had grown, all the new-born tenderness of my nature asserted itself, and I could not speak for tears.

“She was touched by my grief and said, stroking my hair gently as she had done on the day I saw her first—

“‘Poor child—poor child. Have you come back again to be my daughter once more?’

“I answered, sobbing—‘No, that cannot be, I have forfeited the right by my ingratitude, my passion, and my pride. It was an evil day for you that ever I came to your house.’

“She kissed me and put her hand on my lips. ‘You must not say that,’ she whispered, ‘it is true that you have grieved me, but you have made many an hour bright and beautiful that without you would have been dull and sad. Come back Laura and bring your child, we will forget the past and be happier than we have ever been.’

“‘It cannot be,’ I said, ‘but since you are so gentle and forgiving, grant me this entreaty, enable me to reach England. That is all I ask.’

“‘England,’ she repeated in surprise, ‘you have always said that you hated England.’

“‘But Beatrice is there,’ I cried, ‘and I yearn to hold her in my arms again. It is this longing that has made me renounce pride, anger, everything, and plead for this boon humbly at your feet.’

“After many further entreaties that I would stay with her, she told me that she had placed her fortune in my husband’s hands to invest, that he had lost it with his own, and that with the

exception of her furniture and jewels she was almost as poor as I.'

" ' But I have friends in England,' she said, ' and I have been thinking lately of accepting their proposal—that I should live with them. If you are determined to go to England Laura, I have still money enough left to take you with me.'

" I was loth to accept her aid under these altered circumstances, which I had not suspected, but she was so generous and loving in every word and action, and I yearned so to see my beautiful Beatrice again, that after a little hesitation I gratefully accepted her offer. But on the voyage she died, and I landed in England without a friend.

" I had some jewels however, and a little money, for she had given me almost all that she possessed when she was dying. This enabled me to reach London and pay for a quiet lodging there.

" This was seven years ago, and you Edith

were then only eight years old. The remainder of my life you know, how all my endeavours to find Beatrice have failed, how by teaching Italian and music I have earned enough for us to live upon, and for you to receive the training for the stage your brilliant talents have demanded.

“ I believe there is a great future before you Edith, that your beauty and your genius will win you fame, and that through any fame or victory your purity and truth will be unsullied and unspoiled.

“ There—let the record end. I said it was a tale of a selfish life, it is for you my Edith to redeem my failure by your achievement—to be gentle where I have been cold—womanly where I have been selfish, and true where I have been false. That you will do so I have no fear.

“ I have said that I believe my life to be nearly over. This is no idle fancy of a diseased mind, but an earnest conviction.

“ Be it so, for your sake I would rather live and

see you triumph, but I am weary and it is better I should die.

“ Laura Genari Ashford.”

This was all. The letter had been sealed, and the superscription was—

“ For Edith, not to be opened before her seventeenth birthday.”

Under this, in Edith's writing, was a note to the effect that this request had been strictly complied with, though her mother had died within a month of the date of the letter.

Arthur finished his reading with very mingled feelings. The chain of circumstances that had led to the discovery, had stretched over two years and a half, and for more than a year he had known Edith Ashford, yet he had never mentioned Maud during the whole of that time, nor had Edith said a word concerning her mother's history.

“ I wonder what further scenes there may be in this drama,” he said to himself. “ I can scarcely

believe that Maud is Edith Ashford's first cousin, and that their mothers loved each other so passionately when they wandered about — two innocent ignorant children — in the streets of Rome. Though I don't know why I should wonder at it," he added; "my growing experience of London life is perpetually unveiling coincidences like these. And yet there are men who can see no mystery in life, or in the unseen Power that is perpetually controlling our lives so strangely. I will call on Miss Ashford to-morrow, and explain what she must think very strange behaviour on my part."

He folded the paper again, and though it was late, took out his book and began to write.

For a little while his thoughts wandered upon the paper he had just been reading; but presently his theme fascinated him, as it always did, and he forgot poor Edith utterly in his dreams of Maud.

CHAPTER X.

“Hence is the inner life of so many suffering women
Sunless, and silent, and deep, like subterranean
rivers

Running through caverns of darkness, unheard,
unseen, and unfruitful ;

Chafing their channels of stone with endless and
profitless murmurs.”

Longfellow.

(The Courtship of Miles Standish.)

EDITH ASHFORD thought much that night of Arthur's strange recognition of her necklace, and his promise to call next morning and explain the mystery. If she had had time for reflection she would have hesitated before giving him her mother's life-story to read, with its frank

avowal of past error, its repeated self-reproach, and its declaration of a passionate love to which she had not been constant save in feeling. But it was a necessity of Edith's nature to act upon the impulse of the moment, and her action in this case had been guided at once by the earnestness of Arthur's manner, and the conviction that there was some mystery whose solution he had long sought, and to which these writings of her mother would supply the clue.

What could the mystery be? Edith asked herself the question over and over again, but could find no satisfactory answer, though she imagined almost every possible reason for Arthur's words but the right one. Her chief feeling with regard to his promised explanation was one of excited but pleasurable anticipation. In most natures that are controlled by passionate feeling only, (as light vessels in a swiftly rushing stream are guided by the impetuous waters), there is a strong tendency to superstition.

It seemed to Edith as though events were bringing her nearer to Arthur, that this new coincidence was another thread in the web of their different lives that might explain the meaning of both, and this thought which had crossed Arthur's mind like a haunting fancy, with her had all the weight of an intelligent conviction. So the poor child mused in her dream palace, with no foreboding dread that the airy fabric would so soon be shattered.

Next morning Arthur called as he promised, to return her the papers.

"I am afraid, Miss Ashford, you must have wondered at my strange enquiries last night, concerning the history of your locket," he said, "but I told you it was from no motive of idle curiosity. I believed that each of us held a fragment of the story, which could only be rendered complete by linking them together."

"And that belief," she said, "is it confirmed or destroyed?"

“It is entirely confirmed,” he answered, “as you will admit when I show you this.”

He slightly raised his coat sleeve as he spoke, and showed her the fine gold chain, with the small locket attached, that Maud had bound round his wrist at their last parting.

Edith uttered a quick exclamation of surprise.

“It is exactly like mine,” she said, “but I do not understand——”

“There were two lockets you remember,” he replied, “this is the other one; I said we each held the fragment of a story. The part expressed by your mother’s letter I learnt for the first time last night. The other part relates to your mother’s sister, the Beatrice whom she loved so tenderly, and that I have known for more than two years.”

Edith listened in utter surprise. The uppermost thought in her mind was wonder how Arthur came to be associated with the circum-

stances of which he spoke. The idea that his connexion with them might be a slight and purely accidental one arising out of his labours among the poor perhaps, was at once dispelled by his wearing the chain round his wrist.

He seemed to divine her thoughts, for he continued with a smile—

“You wonder perhaps what I have to do with it at all. It does appear strange on the surface, but life is full of these strange coincidences. Events that expressed in fiction sapient critics would condemn as improbable, are perpetually occurring in actual life. I scarcely ever meet a man who does not know a dozen instances like this. The fact of your holding these papers so long without my suspecting it is only an illustration of the same fact. My knowledge of the matter is easily explained. It arises from my reading (more than two years ago) a letter written by Beatrice Genari to her lover, telling the whole story of her life.”

"Written by my mother's own sister?" said Edith, slowly.

"By your mother's own sister. Some day, not very far distant I hope, Miss Ashford, the letter will come again into my possession. I think you will admit when you have read it that it fully verifies your mother's description of her sister's gentle unselfish character."

"But how came you to see this letter, Mr. Calverley?"

"It's very difficult to tell a story like this without digression," said Arthur, laughing, "and I'm afraid it's a sin to which I am rather addicted. The answer to your question is given in Beatrice Genari's letter. I won't attempt to give anything like an accurate summary of it, but broadly speaking the facts are these. After she had parted with your mother she lived—child as she was—alone, singing ballads in the streets, as the two children had done together, until an English gentleman (fascinated by her beauty,

her innocence, and a resemblance he fancied he saw in her to a lady whom he had loved many years before,) adopted her and treated her in every way as his own child. But he died intestate, and she came to England as a governess, believing that her sister Laura (for whom she had made many enquiries) was dead. A few weeks after her arrival in England, one of the guests of Lady Aldred, (whose daughter she taught) won her love, and her promise to become his wife."

For the first time, why she could not have explained, Edith felt a vague dread of his coming words, she listened breathlessly but said nothing.

"Her lover's name," continued Arthur, "was Ralph Atherton. He was the younger son of a Baronet of some political standing and immense family pride. Sir James had made up his mind that Ralph must marry an heiress, and restore the family finances to their old flourishing condition.

But Ralph Atherton loved the beautiful Italian girl far too well to renounce her at the bidding of anyone. He quarrelled with his father and his friends, married Beatrice Genari and commenced the world afresh, wisely forgetting the dignities of rank and working hard for his bread."

"Are they living still," asked Edith, quickly.

Arthur shook his head. "That is the sad part of the story," he answered, "Ralph Atherton's wife a year after her marriage, in giving birth to a daughter—died. I have been told that for months afterwards Ralph Atherton brooded over his sorrow with hopeless despair, till those around him feared his reason would leave him utterly. At last he sufficiently recovered to take his place in the world again, but he was quite changed from the light-hearted man he had been. He felt unequal to the strain of city life, and determined to devote the remainder of his years to quiet work in some country parish. He had never intended before to enter the church, but his

wife's death had changed the aspect of everything to him. After the necessary course of study, he was ordained a clergyman of the Church of England and went to live at Elverley, where he worked nobly till his death."

Arthur paused a moment at the rush of thoughts through his mind, while Edith waited with the same eagerness of silent attention she had given to his story throughout.

"I say he lived in Elverley engaged in earnest, true-hearted work," resumed Arthur, "it was here that I first met him. The child of whom I have spoken, who cost her mother's life, lived in the quiet country village with her father, and became the one source of gladness left him in his altered life. She grew to be a beautiful girl—beautiful in heart and mind as well as in face. Maud Atherton—your cousin is living now—she is the woman whom I love better than anything else in God's universe. It was she who bound this chain round my wrist as the pledge of

the troth she had plighted, and the love with which she has honoured me."

Edith Ashford was an actress, skilled in the command of feature, therefore her self-control did not fail her now; she sat with her quiet attentive face turned towards Arthur, without betraying by the slightest gesture or expression any depth of feeling occasioned by his words, but if he could have known the storm of conflicting passion hidden so completely by her calm face, that was raging in her bosom, he would as soon have thought of striking her to the ground, as of paining her by praises of Maud.

But Arthur never suspected this, and the subject of Maud was so sweet to him that he could not fancy it being painful to any one else.

"That is the story," he said, "or rather the outline of it. Sir James Atherton relented before he died and left Maud a large sum of money which was to accumulate at compound interest, till she attained her majority. But her father

died when she was only eighteen, she came to live at her guardian's house in London, and I parted from her then with the understanding that I would claim her for my wife on her twenty-first birthday."

Arthur paused again, and Edith felt she must say something if she wished her secret to continue hidden, but it costs more effort to control the voice than the face in moments of intense feeling, and she dreaded the betrayal of her love as though it had been a crime. Here too, however, she conquered herself, and when at last she spoke, her voice was perfectly clear and calm.

"Is my cousin Maud beautiful?" she asked.

"She is very beautiful," he said. "Hers is one of those faces that change with every wave of thought and feeling, and in that ever varying expression lies the secret of the tyrannical fascination of her beauty. But I hope you will see her soon so I consider myself absolved from the

necessity of description, which is a comfort, as I should have failed ignominiously if I had attempted it. Description is always unsatisfactory, but when its theme is a girl like Maud Atherton its incapacity to do justice to its subject becomes positively irritating."

Edith said "yes," mechanically, and still sat outwardly calm and attentive while Arthur, glad at last to have found some one to whom he could speak freely on the subject nearest to his heart, forgot his own words and attempted a long description of Maud, every word torturing his listener, who quiet and composed as she appeared on the surface, could scarcely refrain from throwing herself on the ground and sobbing out the sorrow she was determined to conceal.

But even torture has an end. Arthur rose at last to go.

"I hope I have not bored you by my rhapsody," he said, laughingly, "if I have, you will own I think when you see Maud that I can plead great

excuse for being enthusiastic concerning her; but I must not detain you any longer. Good bye, Miss Ashford; good bye, Nellie; I mustn't call you my little Raven any longer I suppose, now you are growing such a young lady."

"I like you to call me Raven," said the child, "because you called me so the day you spoke to me first, and you shall call me that when I'm grown up and wear long dresses; but nobody else shall, except Miss Edith."

Arthur laughed at Nellie's notions of womanhood, expressed himself grateful for the permission, kissed her, and hurried away.

Nellie ran downstairs to let him out, a privilege she would never yield to anyone else, but when she came back to the drawing-room, she found to her astonishment Edith Ashford with her face buried in her hands, silently weeping.

"What is the matter, dear Miss Edith?" she cried, caressing her. "Has anyone been unkind to you?"

Edith hastily dashed the tears from her eyes, and tried to smile.

“There is nothing whatever the matter, Nellie,” she said, “and no one has been at all unkind to me.”

“But people never cry unless they’re sorry about something,” said Nellie, taking refuge in the logical application of general principles, “and I never saw you cry, Miss Edith, before to-day.”

“I am tired Nellie, that is all.”

The child was evidently not satisfied with the reason. “Is Mr. Arthur angry with you?” she asked, picturing the most terrible calamity she could imagine.

“No—no darling,” said Edith, kissing her, “there is nothing wrong—at least—nothing that can be helped. Go downstairs to Sarah for a little while now, I want to be alone.”

Nellie went slowly and sorrowfully downstairs, with an indistinct undefined notion that life was

rather uncomfortable even when one lived in a fine house and had plenty of money.

And Edith?

She did not shed many tears, but the acute pain she had felt at first became something far harder to bear—a dull disappointment and a weariness of life.

She had never admitted to herself that she loved Arthur, still less had she fancied how much hope was in her heart that he might give her his love in return; but she knew fully now, and her heart sank at the thought of the wearying days of uncheered duty that lay before her.

Of all the forms which sorrow takes in this strange drama of agony men call life, there is none so pitiful as disappointment of long cherished hopes. Cries of agony have been wailed to heaven by men and women born to a life of want or pain, or the dark heritage of shame; but sadder far are they who have travelled long towards a Land of Promise only to

find it a mirage. But a heart that breaks silently is too common a thing for our philosophy to trouble itself about. Besides it was settled long ago that hearts don't break, that they are of altogether too leathery a nature for such a possibility; and if a woman now and then has a tender heart she must expect to suffer for it, just as a genius should expect to starve; nothing is so ill-bred, saith 'society,' as eccentricity.

As Edith sat wearily thinking of Arthur's words she mechanically opened her mother's letter, and the Italian poem fell from it upon the ground. She took it up and read it through with a new understanding of its meaning, for she knew that it was written concerning her mother by the young poet whom she had loved so passionately. The translation of a love song is almost as unsatisfactory as a verbal description of orchestral music, for felicity of phrase and musical rhythm constitute its chief charm; but the poem Laura Genari had treasured so long was something to this effect—

" I dreamt that the stars grew pale,
That the sun had lost its light,
That music sank to a fitful wail,
And the earth was veiled in night.
The earth was veiled in night,
The roses drooped and died,
While over the ruin of beauty bright,
The sad winds moaned and cried.

I stood in the valley sweet,
That throbbed with hope and love,
When wild flow'rs bloomed beneath my feet,
And starlight smiled above.
But the skies were dark above,
As I cried with a weary pain—
' Will never a hand the curse remove,
And gladden the earth again ? '

But a maiden's song was borne
On the night's black wings to me,
' Care is gladness and night is morn,
Where love and trust may be.
Where love and trust may be,
There are joy and rest,' she sang,
And through the valley clear and free,
The tones of her sweet voice rang.

As on she came—my queen,
With light and noiseless tread,

The dying grass grew fresh and green,
And stars shone o'er my head.
The stars shone o'er my head,
To hear my darling sing,
While lily and rose I thought were dead,
Grew bright with the bloom of spring.

You smile, oh world, at my dream,
As a lover's wild ideal,
But valley, mountain, and flowing stream
Are less intensely real.

Are less intensely real
Than the beauty of her face,
Than the tender love her eyes reveal,
Or her words of queenly grace.

Better the flow'rs should fade,
Than her voice should silent be,
Though golden sunlight turn to shade,
There is light my love with thee.
There is light dear heart with thee,
Whate'er dark fate betide,
And sweeter were death in thy arms to me,
Than life for aught beside."

The deepest truth of life is expressed in the beautiful hyperbole of love. Edith read the poem through with that hungry yearning for help and

sympathy which exists only in women's hearts. "Arthur's love for Maud is like this," she said, and something like hatred sprang up in her breast at the thought of this girl who lived as a queen, in a world where she would gladly have served as a slave.

Arthur would never have loved her, even if he had never seen Maud. She was quite unable to sympathise with many of his aims, or to meet the varied requirements of his nature. She was only rich in love and beauty, a glorious dowry, but the treasury of womanhood has wealth more wondrous than this. But what woman could ever balance possibilities with so steady a hand as to detect all this in the first bitterness of disenchantment? Edith could not, and it seemed to her as though Maud's small hand had locked the gates of Paradise for ever.

"But I will not be crushed by this," she said, resolutely, as she rose at last from her reverie. "Fame is a poor substitute for love, but at least

CHAPTER XI.

“*Cordelia*.—Sir, do you know me?

Lear.—You are a spirit I know. When did you die?”

Shakespeare.

DURING the next three months Arthur saw little of Edith Ashford. His time was so fully occupied that he could only pay Nellie Yempson very hurried visits, and several times when he called at the Kensington house Edith was not at home. But when he did see her her manner was almost exactly the same as it had been throughout their acquaintance. Once Arthur fancied that she grew more reticent and

silent than she had once been, but he ascribed this to her secluded life or mere caprice, and dismissed the subject from his mind.

He worked day and night harder than ever, as the June day when Maud would be one and twenty years of age grew nearer. The time of banishment that had seemed so long to look forward to was nearly over, and no captive ever notched the days on a prison stool more thankfully than Arthur counted their rapid flight.

He had published his book and it had been successful beyond his wildest hopes. First efforts are always faulty and Arthur's was no exception to the general rule. It would have been strange if it had been otherwise, for apart from his inexperience he had been compelled to write hurriedly, and at times when his severer labours had wearied and exhausted him; therefore the book was very far from faultless, and the critics whose habit was to search literature for defects like hidden treasure, found their labour fairly rewarded here.

But negative criticism like negative virtue is rather a paltry thing. The value of a book (like the value of a man) is determined by the good that it contains, and not by the number of its failings. Arthur's truest critics and truest readers felt this, and freely gave him a place among the authors of high aims and noble powers who, amid the Babel and clamour of opinion politely termed modern thought, strive with passionate earnestness to utter words that are real and true.

For Arthur's book was rich in the noblest wealth in the universe—the treasures of thought. Scattered over the story, and with no sparing hand, were delicate fancies and subtle reflections that bore the imperial stamp of genius. Nothing is easier than to speak fluently and with sufficient plausibility to command attention; but to utter a true thought demands some of the highest powers of manhood. It needs an intellect powerful and vigorous — tested, strained and

strengthened by toil—and a heart that has been initiated into the divine mysteries of sympathy, self-forgetfulness, and love.

Nowhere in Arthur's book were his powers more finely displayed than in the delineation of his heroine's character. Women like Maud Atherton defy description, for beauty and fascination on paper bear about as much resemblance to the reality as the manuscript of an oratorio bears to its performance by skilled musicians, but the painted image of a true woman is beautiful, if it be only faithful, as revelation of divine mystery is glorious, however fragmentary and incomplete it may be, provided that no word of it is false.

Arthur's book was widely read, and for the most part generously reviewed, the most notable exception being a criticism from the pen of Mr. Scrodge, who having become the editor of a weekly periodical, had steadily set to work to blacken Arthur's reputation by insinuation,

calumny, and invective. The publication of a book by Arthur had delighted him beyond measure, and he had assailed it with all the fury of frantic hate, but in this as in his former endeavours he overacted his part, and consequently failed. In spite of Hamlet's belief to the contrary, lying is not remarkably easy, except in its grossest and most vulgar forms, and all honest men have reason to be devoutly grateful that it is so, for a vulgar liar soon defeats his own aims, but a clever scoundrel like Iago, wields a well nigh resistless power.

Arthur received letters of congratulation from all quarters but the one he cared for most. Maud's enforced silence was not over yet, so he did not know then how she had read his book, appreciating and understanding it as no one else could do, for she had detected his purpose at once, and her beautiful eyes had grown brighter with gladness, and with tears at the assurance that he thought her worthy of such worship, and that her lightest

word, or look, or touch could nerve his soul to heroism. "I am not like this," she said to herself as she traced the life of Arthur's ideal heroine, "but I know of whom he was thinking when he sketched this character, and I am proud and grateful that such love is mine."

This Arthur could not know, but many others wrote or spoke their appreciation. Walter Medhurst sent him a very different judgment to the one he had pronounced upon the comedy they had discussed together at Norwood some time ago, and Clara Corrie in a droll letter had exhausted all the emphatic adjectives of praise she could think of, in her eulogy upon the book. But no letter had touched him so deeply as a short one he received from Lady Kate Glendale. It had no signature or date, but he knew the handwriting too well to mistake it. It was as follows—

"I never meant to write to you again—or by any act to recall myself to your remembrance.

But I have read your book, and I must send you a word of gratitude, for I have found in your thoughts about womanhood, strength and encouragement which nothing else has given me. I am so far—oh so very very far from your ideal, but I am trying to do what you told me—to think for others and be patient under sorrow and weariness. Sometimes I think I shall not live long, and even if it be otherwise I shall never see your face again, but if ever a thought of me crosses your mind, you may believe that when your arms held me back from death, your words of pitying forgiveness and trust saved me from a life that was incomparably worse.”

That was all.

Arthur was grateful for words like these, for the strongest feeling in his own mind concerning his book was the consciousness of failure. It is so always with the true artist; the achievement must always fall so far below the ideal, that he will lay down pen or pencil sorrowfully, though

multitudes are ready to award him the laurel-wreath of victory ; only little minds have tasted the sweetness of self-complacent success.

But in the very moment of triumph Arthur's strength failed. For nearly three years he had been overstraining his powers by hard work and intense study. It had been no uncommon thing for him to write till three or four o'clock in the morning, and then after three hours sleep to commence work afresh. His great energy of mind and purpose, and his splendid constitution had enabled him to bear the undue strain of his labours hitherto, but now that his book was finished, and the necessity for such continuous toil existed no longer, the inevitable failure of health was the result.

If Arthur had realised the danger he was in, he would have left off work for a few weeks and recruited his energies by rest and fresh air. But he had many important schemes yet to carry out, the editorship of the ' London Review ' could be

intrusted to no one else without great inconvenience, and many other things rendered his absence difficult of arrangement, so Arthur determined to struggle with this weakness till it was vanquished, as he had surmounted other obstacles by sheer energy of purpose.

But one afternoon, about six weeks after the publication of his book, Arthur felt that the unequal struggle could last no longer. He had been writing all day the last of some historical essays he was contributing to the 'Review,' but he had found unusual difficulty in concentrating his mind upon the subject, and his thoughts had been slow and laboured instead of occurring to him as they usually did, freely and without effort; at last the pen fell from his hand, and the room seemed to reel before him.

He was shivering with cold though his head and hands were burning. He rose from his chair and walked unsteadily across the room to the sofa upon which he threw himself wearily, and soon fell asleep.

At about six o'clock there was a light tap at his door, and a childish voice asked for admittance. Little Nellie Yempson had coaxed Sarah into letting her go to see Arthur, since he had had so little time to spare for her lately, and Nellie, elated at the prospect of being petted and played with, and not a little proud at being allowed to come so far alone, was in high spirits, and waited impatiently for the door to be opened.

But all was quiet and still, and though she knocked a second time there was no reply. Waiting no longer the child opened the door and entered the room. Arthur was still lying asleep on the sofa, and Nellie's footstep was too light to awake him, but when she placed her cool hand upon his forehead he started up, and looked wildly at her.

The child was frightened by his manner.

"Dear Mr. Arthur," she cried, "do you not know me? It is I—your little Raven. Won't you speak to me?"

“It is of no use,” he muttered incoherently, “she will never care for me. She is beautiful and——do you know her? I thought you said you came from Maud.”

He broke off to ask the question, and then continued without waiting for a reply.

“I forgot, you do not know her or you would never have left her. There is no one like her anywhere, I would sooner win her heart than be monarch of all the stars of heaven. And she loves me—for we have kissed each other and plighted troth—but that was long ago. Go and tell her now that I am dying.” And exhausted by the effort of speech he fell back on the couch again.

Little Nellie Yempson saw the truth now; child as she was, her life in Abel Alley had familiarised her with illness, and she had witnessed delirium before. But that Arthur, whom she regarded as a giant in strength, intellect and wealth, should suffer as her mother had done,

terrified and bewildered her. While he was speaking she stood by the sofa unable to move a step till he uttered the word "dying."

This word—the terrible echo of her thoughts broke the spell that bound her. "You shall not die," she sobbed, passionately, "God will not let you die."

He had sunk again into a kind of stupor, there was no time for hesitation, she must bring help at once. But where could she find it? The rest of the house consisted of offices, the clerks had all gone home, and the housekeeper was an old woman utterly incapable of being of any use to any one under any circumstances whatever. "I will go to Miss Edith," thought the child, "she will help me if no one else can."

She bent over the unconscious figure and kissed the parched lips tenderly, then ran wildly into the street.

Many people turned round to watch the little figure, with its streaming golden hair, as she ran

through the crowded streets utterly regardless of the grumbling pedestrians who pushed and jostled her. Some would have stopped the child and questioned her, but she hurried on without pausing for a moment—her rapid footsteps seeming to her excited fancy to echo the one thought of her heart.

“ We will save him for we love him—he shall not die.”

CHAPTER XII.

“ I made a posie while the day ran by,
Here will I smell my remnant out and tie
My life within this band.
But time did beckon to the flowers, and they
By noon most cunningly did steal away,
And wither'd in my hand.”

George Herbert.

WHILE little Nellie Yempson was hurrying wildly through the crowded streets, Edith Ashford sat alone in the old room at Kensington, where she had first learnt to love Arthur's words and had built the fairy dream-palace that was shattered for ever now.

The piano was open, but she was not playing ; she sat before it thinking as many a heart has thought before, that it would be well to yield up this strain and struggle of life for a dreamless rest and immunity from pain.

She had gained the prize she had longed for. All London was ringing with the plaudits of her last dramatic triumph. As Juliet—the most passionate of Shakespeare's heroines, the character for which Arthur had believed her peculiarly adapted—she had won not merely the applause of crowded theatres and the praise of newspapers, but the admiration of the true critics, who regarded acting as the light of art and teaching rather than the effective glitter of an evening's show.

She had longed for fame and she had won it. The young actress was talked of everywhere—her beauty, her modesty, and her wonderful proficiency in her art were themes of universal interest. She had been envied, flattered, deferred

to, and had tasted in all its sweetness the excitement of triumphant success.

A few months before, she would have received this homage with grateful gladness, as the end she had longed for and dreamed about since her childhood, but now it seemed to her mere mockery, like the sound of song and dance, in a house whose fairest inmate lies cold and dead.

To some people this may seem overcharged. Love, except in poetry, we are taught to believe is a mere polite liking, which every husband in good society entertains for his wife, and every wife feels for her husband. If a man is fool enough to love, where love is hopeless, he takes to billiards; if a woman is guilty of a similar absurdity, she finds relief in croquet parties, or tea-table scandal. In either case, forgetfulness is easy, and regret absurd. "If any man doubt this," says Mrs. Grundy, wearing her bonnet as much like a Papal crown as possible, "let him be anathema."

And yet love is and must ever be the deepest reality of life. What man of intense feeling however trained and disciplined his mind, can deny that in his truest moments, the loving reverence of a woman's heart has seemed better worth winning than the sovereignty of empires or the wealth of worlds ?

And with women, where the emotional elements of character are stronger and less restrained, love means not only the deepest thing in life, but life itself. Edith Ashford was only nineteen, her intense passionate nature had received little culture but the teachings of poets and dramatists, her whole life had been one of unchecked impulse. Arthur had seemed to her utterly unlike everyone she had known, wiser, stronger and gentler than anyone else ; it was natural she should love him, and with her love meant a passion that absorbed and conquered everything.

“ I wonder,” she said to herself wearily, “ if any of the people who threw bouquets at my feet

last night guessed how sad and weary I was. I suppose they thought I could only mimic love, not that I had been telling them my own secret in Shakespeare's words."

Arthur's book lay on the table, she took it up, and tried to read it, but the twilight was deepening fast, and after reading a page or two, she was obliged to give up the attempt.

"If he had loved me," she thought, "as he loves Maud, life would have been almost too great a joy to bear, but now ——"

She was interrupted by the sound of hurrying footsteps. In another moment the door opened, little Nellie Yempson rushed in and threw herself at Edith's feet.

"What is the matter, darling?" said Edith, gently stroking the child's golden hair.

Nellie was too much out of breath with running to answer at once, but after a moment or two she recovered herself sufficiently to utter Arthur's name.

Edith started from her chair.

“Has anything happened to him?” she cried.

“He is ill,” answered Nellie, “very ill. I have just come from Fleet Street; but he did not know me, and he talked strangely. He will die—unless you can save him.”

The child's last words were the echo of Edith's own thoughts. Arthur was ill—dying perhaps—she would renounce everything for his sake; she would nurse him through this illness, heedless of danger or fatigue. But then the thought came to what end? Simply that he might be happy with Maud: she could not bear the thought. For a moment, while envy and hatred were rankling in her breast, there was a cry in her heart—“Better that he should die and she should learn something of misery too.” She stood, trembling with the struggle of passionate feeling, silently watching the excited child.

“Dear Miss Edith,” said Nellie, earnestly, “won't you do something to help him? If I

could save him I would do anything, for I love him—and I thought you loved him too.”

The struggle in Edith's heart was not a long one. Love gained the mastery and her face grew resolute with earnest purpose.

She caught the child in her arms and kissed her passionately.

“Don't cry, darling,” she whispered, “you are right. I do love him, and I will save his life.”

Without another word she put on her hat and hurried into the street.

Three doors from Mrs. Collop's house was the residence of a celebrated physician. As the young actress ran into the street a carriage drove up to the door, and he himself alighted from it, instinctively she ran up to him and laid her hand upon his arm. The doctor turned round and uttered an exclamation of surprise for he knew Edith by sight.

“Is anything the matter, Miss Ashford?” he said, “you are very pale. Are you ill?”

“No,” she answered quickly, “I am not ill, but I have a friend who is very ill—dying perhaps—will you not come and see him?”

Dr. Linley was a man of about five-and-fifty, grave, calm, and thoughtful. He had devoted all his time and energy to the study of his profession, and to science he was earnestly attached, but nothing ever quickened his speech or seemed to excite him. This, and the fact that he had never married caused people to declare that he was indifferent to all that moved other men, and was absolutely without heart. On the present occasion he did not belie his character by any departure from his wonted self-possession, but he was touched by the beauty of Edith’s pleading face, and he said with courteous gentleness—

“I will go wherever you wish me, if you will give me the address the coachman shall drive there now.”

She thanked him hurriedly and gave him the address, upon which he very deliberately handed

her into the carriage, slowly stepped in himself, and they drove off.

He asked her one or two questions, about the case, and betrayed no surprise on learning that she was ignorant of the symptoms. Edith felt it a relief to escape further questioning—though there was a great dread at her heart that they might arrive too late; she looked at Dr. Linley with a kind of illogical wonder that he could be so calm while life and death trembled in the balance. But his composure expressed the consciousness of strength, and there was comfort in that.

Arrived at the house, he handed her out of the carriage with the same tedious politeness, and they went upstairs together.

Arthur was still lying on the sofa, but the doctor's entrance seemed to rouse him; he said something incoherently and made an ineffectual attempt to rise.

While Dr. Linley was examining his patient, Edith waited in suspense outside the door. How

long the time seemed; would he never come? At last the doctor came out of the room, his face betraying nothing whatever.

“What is his illness?” she asked, breathlessly.

“It is a very bad fever,” was the slow rejoinder.

“It is easy to detect the cause of this. Mr. Calverley has been overtaxing his powers—absurdly so—and has consequently rendered himself susceptible to infection, and disease is very prevalent just now in the parts of London which he has been visiting.”

“And the end of this?”

“That I cannot predict with any degree of certainty. With most men this attack would be fatal, but Mr. Calverley has a very fine constitution.”

“How do you know that?”

“I have been brought into connexion with him once or twice through his consulting me on some questions of sanitary improvement. I recognised him at once, though I had no idea he lived here.

He will need very careful treatment. Are none of his relations living near him ? ”

“ I know of none,” said Edith, quickly, “ but I will nurse him if you will tell me what to do.”

“ I do not see how that can be, this will be a tedious affair most likely, and the danger of contagion—”

Edith disposed of the objections with an impatient gesture.

“ It is useless arguing,” she said, “ I am resolved. Will you send a message to the theatre for me ? I was to have acted there to-night.”

Dr. Linley was not in the habit of conceding to an opinion, professional or otherwise, but he saw in this case remonstrance was useless, so he merely said—

“ If you insist upon adopting what you will forgive my calling an unwise course—you must at least have the help of a trained nurse. If you will wait a few minutes I will try and engage one—there are several living not far from here.”

Edith dreaded his leisurely habits would make his absence a long one; but he returned much sooner than she had expected, bringing with him the nurse, a middle-aged woman whose quiet manner and gentle voice were very different to those of the feminine ogre Edith had always associated (and not altogether without reason) with the idea of a professed nurse.

“What time were you to have been at the theatre?” enquired Dr. Linley.

“At eight o’clock.”

“Then I see no reason why you should not keep your engagement to-night. It is twenty minutes to eight now, but I can easily drive you down in time. Mrs. Leel will see to Mr. Calverley. I assure you there is not the slightest immediate danger.”

He made the suggestion more with a view of hearing what she would say than in any belief that she would accept it. Of the common sense of women, particularly of women who were young

and beautiful, he was somewhat incredulous ; but this girl interested him, and he studied character with the same calm thought he gave to disease.

“If you are certain there is no immediate danger,” said Edith, after a moment’s hesitation, “I will go to the theatre to-night. But I entreat you not to deceive me.”

“I am quite certain there is none. But perhaps you have not sufficient self-control to act to-night,” replied the doctor.

“I have self-control for more than that,” she answered quietly, “if you are ready we will go at once.”

At the theatre they parted, Dr. Linley promising to call again in the morning ; but instead of returning home as he had intended he too entered the crowded building, curious to see how this strange girl would act after her late excitement.

Edith went at once to the Manager’s room to tell him of her intention. Mr. Corvette, the manager, was a genial middle-aged man, who had

always treated her with great courtesy and generosity.

He bowed and held out his hand as she entered the room.

“What is it, Miss Ashford,” he said, “a grievance or a demand? You are so famous now that whatever it is I suppose your request must be granted.”

“I do not ask any favour Mr. Corvette,” said Edith quietly, “I have simply come to tell you that my engagement here must end to-night.”

“Impossible,” exclaimed the manager, “I cannot consent to any such monstrous idea. The whole theatrical season must not be ruined by a mere caprice. I would sooner double your salary.”

“It is not that,” she answered, “nor is it a mere caprice. You have been very kind to me, and no small thing would have made me take this step. Of course, I forfeit by this the sums of money you have already given me. These I

return you now," she added, throwing a roll of notes upon the table, "and as for the terms of our agreement, I consider myself morally absolved from them. Legally, of course I am still bound, and if you choose to take legal proceedings I cannot prevent you. But you cannot alter my resolve."

Mr. Corvette pushed back the bank-notes rather impatiently.

"Don't put the matter in that light," he said, "you know perfectly well I should never bring an action against you. But you spoke of being 'morally absolved' from your engagement, I think I have a right to know how you can be so."

Edith hesitated a moment, but there was something so kind in his manner in spite of his irritation that she determined to confide in him.

"If I tell you my reason," she said, "will you promise never to betray my confidence?"

"Yes, I promise that Miss Ashford."

Edith had been very pale during the interview, but she blushed now as she said—

“ You know Mr. Calverley ? ”

“ Yes, very well.”

“ He is very ill—perhaps he may die—and I am going to nurse him.”

The manager looked at Edith with some misgiving that she was mad.

“ Is Mr. Calverley any relation of yours ? ” he asked.

“ None whatever.”

“ Is there any betrothal or likelihood of a betrothal between you ? ”

“ No.”

“ Then if you will forgive my plain speaking, Miss Ashford; I must confess myself utterly unable to divine your motive.”

“ Mr. Corvette,” said Edith, “ I would rather not have entered on this explanation; but you have claimed it as your right, and in breaking my agreement I appear to wrong you. Mr.

Calverley cares nothing for me, on the contrary he is soon to marry another young lady. But watchful nursing may save his life, and for that possibility I will throw every other consideration to the winds."

"Why?"

"Because I love him," she answered passionately. "Because he is dearer to me than all the world beside."

Mr. Corvette looked wonderingly at her. He was perfectly accustomed to hear sentiments of this description on the stage, but in real life they seemed as much out of place as tissue paper and lime-light.

"Have you considered the consequences?" he asked.

"I am quite indifferent to consequences."

"But they may be very serious. I say nothing about pecuniary loss — that you would soon recover. But there is nothing an actress loses so easily and recovers with so much difficulty as

reputation. Forgive me for using such plain words, but my experience of these matters is wider than yours. You could not take a step of this kind without whispers being circulated that might ruin your fair fame for ever."

Edith looked at him steadfastly.

"I cannot control rumour," she said, "but I will not be controlled by it. I am Italian not English, and I care little for the English people. The voice of all London is worth infinitely less to me than the lightest praise of Arthur Calverley."

At this moment a messenger came to tell her that the second scene of the tragedy had begun, and that her presence was required almost immediately on the stage.

"Will you act to-night?" said Mr. Corvette, anxiously.

"Yes," she replied, "but it must be for the last time."

"I see that any attempt to move you from your resolution is useless," said the manager,

“so I will say no more, though I cannot deny my regret at your determination. But at least let us part friends.” And he handed her back the bank-notes she had thrown upon the table.

“No,” said Edith, “it is only right I should return you that since I am cancelling our agreement.”

“But you have fairly earned that,” said the manager, “and much more, for no one could have anticipated you would have achieved such a brilliant success. I have yielded everything to you in this interview; I think you might yield so small a point as this to me.”

“I will take half then,” said Edith, “and I shall always be grateful to you for your generosity and consideration,” and the moment for her appearance having almost arrived, she hurried off to the dressing rooms.

Her acting that night was remembered by her audience years afterwards. There was something in her voice and manner no one had ever seen

before, though her acting in 'Romeo and Juliet' had been throughout a wonderful success. There were few in the crowded theatre, who did not feel this, and fewer still perhaps who could have explained what it was.

But Dr. Linley, the grave physician, who sat watching the tragedy to all appearance the most indifferent spectator in the house could have told them the secret of the power which held them captive.

It lay in the passionate love of her own soul, the love that had entirely changed her nature, teaching her the inner meaning of Shakespeare's wonderful words, and making her strong for action, endurance and renunciation.

Dr. Linley went home that night thinking sadly of days long past, when the balcony scene in 'Romeo and Juliet' had seemed to him the truest thing in English literature.

CHAPTER XIII.

“ As the earth, when leaves are dead,
As the night, when sleep is sped,
As the heart, when joy is fled,
I am left lone, alone.”

Shelley.

IF the diamonds that sparkled on Maud's hand had possessed the magic power of the jewels in the old Arabian stories—if they had paled or turned blood-red at the moment when their giver was in peril, Horace Arvale's house would have lost its fairest inmate, though her absence had involved defiance of her guardian's authority, and the renunciation of her fortune.

But the ring Arthur had given her shone with as rare a lustre now that he was lying weak and ill as it had done on the morning when he placed it on her finger before going out in the pride of his youth and strength to do battle with the world.

With rarer lustre in her eyes, for in the two years and a half of separation, the ideal of what Arthur might and would be, that had dwelt in her mind when she had first loved him had become a reality. He *had* done great things as she had said he would do. He had won a place, young as he was among the critical thinkers of the time, he had written a book rich in earnest thought and fancy, he had served and helped the poor, he had made sad homes brighter, he had awakened something like healthy life in the souls of men and women whom society regarded as hopelessly bad, and in all this Maud knew that his love for her had been the strongest power to inspire and to sustain him.

She never thought of his health failing. What

‘ fayre ladye ’ ever pictured her own true knight as lying crushed beneath his horse’s feet or slain by his opponent’s lance ?

To a true woman, there is something almost grander in honourable defeat than in bloodless victory, and the tears shed over the prostrate warrior evince a deeper love than the smile accompanying the laurel-wreath ; but no feeling is stronger in a woman’s love than belief in her hero’s possibilities of strength and endurance.

So as her twenty-first birthday grew nearer it was with more than her old gladness of spirit that she lived, and spoke, and thought ; with a truer gladness, for now her heart had known sorrow and conquered it.

Arthur had rightly said that her life could never be uneventful in the true sense of the word, that in the struggles of her heart and mind lay the real incidents of her life-drama, and that only to colourless natures could existence be a dreary or dull routine. But in exact proportion to the

breadth of a character's aims and yearnings, will a congenial arena of activity be longed for. A canary needs only a moderate supply of seeds and water to make its cage a paradise, but a skylark will beat its wings pitifully against the wires in dumb entreaty for the pure air of heaven.

So there were often times when Maud felt tired and weary of this London life, with its treadmill routine of drives, visits, calls, and parties ; but it is a very paltry heroism that can only talk in blank verse, that holds no fellowship with common sense, and retires discomfited at the approach of vulgar reality. So Maud found work, gladness, and helpful teaching even in Horace Arvale's house, as a great musician will evolve grand harmonies from an imperfect instrument whose tone is harsh and discordant when the strings are touched by unskilful fingers.

"Maud," said Blanche Arvale one day, "I want you to go with me to the theatre to-night."

"How many of you are going?" said Maud.

“Mrs. Eltham is going to take Grace Harlington and me—no one else unless you will come. Ernest talked about coming later on in the evening if he could, but he’s very much occupied just now.”

“Making arrangements for the wonderful little home to which he means to take you in another fortnight, I suppose,” said Maud; “and by the way, that reminds me—I have a calamity to break as gently as possible to you.”

“What is it, Maud?”

“An old lover of yours, instead of shooting himself, or swallowing an immense quantity of poison, or writing cynical poetry, or going into a consumption, or adopting any other orthodox course of action, has—don’t faint away—has married again.”

“Who is he?” asked Blanche, laughing.

“Who is he, indeed?” echoed Maud, tragically; “that question seems to imply your consciousness of a plurality of admirers. But I

won't stop to lecture you now, for I know you are undergoing agonies of suspense. The faithless lover is Mr. Thomas Scrump."

"Oh," said Blanche, serenely, "whom has he married, and how did you hear it?"

"He's married a sweet young thing of seventy, with twelve thousand a year. I met him this morning and he told me all about it. 'I think she's better suited to me than Miss Arvale,' he said, 'don't you?' 'From your description,' I replied, as demurely as possible, 'I should most decidedly think so.' I knew it was safe to indulge in a little harmless irony for he never sees the real meaning of it. On this occasion he seemed highly flattered by my words, and his bow at parting seemed to express: 'I have been mistaken in you, Miss Atherton, you are not wholly devoid of common sense after all.' So that chance is lost to you for ever, Blanche."

There was something very musical in Blanche's low laugh of enjoyment; for she was to be

married in a fortnight and was looking forward eagerly to an escape from the thralldom of home. Not that Ernest Cradley could give her many of the luxuries to which she had always been accustomed; but Blanche cared little for these things, the one longing of her life had been for love, for years an unsatisfied longing, since Horace Arvale had never sympathised with or understood her; while her mother would have had a more reasonable chance of success in the endeavour to lasso a wild bull than in the attempt to love anyone—even her own daughter.

But now she was looking forward rather too rapturously perhaps to a new life where love would make a home happy. After a year and a half's absence Ernest Cradley had claimed Blanche's hand in marriage in fulfilment of her father's promise. Mrs. Arvale had been louder than ever in her denunciation of the marriage and her prophecies of the privations of poverty that lay in the future; but Horace Arvale was

mindful of his promise to Maud, and steadfastly refused to put any further obstacle in the way of his daughter's wedding. So in spite of all opposition Blanche was to be married in a fortnight.

"But you have not told me yet Maud," she said, "whether you will come with us to the theatre to-night. Do come, you hardly ever do."

"What is the play to-night?"

"*'Romeo and Juliet,'* and you have never seen Miss Ashford act. You must come."

"Very well, Blanche, I want to see this wonderful young actress everyone is talking about, so we'll go together."

So Maud went and was fascinated by Edith's beauty and genius. Her own impulsive intense nature, only disciplined by long culture, and the force of opposite characteristics, was strangely in harmony with Juliet's words as Edith uttered them. Maud quite forgot to be critical, and yielded herself up to the fascination of this strange girl, with dark eyes and black hair.

But Maud little dreamed the secret of this wonderful acting—that the leading thought in Edith Ashford's mind throughout the evening was Arthur, whom she had left uttering in the incoherent language of delirium his love for Maud, Arthur who was dearer to her than anything else in the world, and for whose sake she was about to renounce her triumphs, and risk all danger that she might minister to his wants.

So the two girls—Maud and Edith—so like in heart, so unlike in mind, for the first time were almost close together. Their mothers had wandered together, children with bare feet, singing in the streets of Rome—each of their lives was influenced by the power of a mighty love, and for the same man, but the time for them to speak of this to one another had not yet come.

While Maud and Blanche were at the theatre, Horace Arvale sat brooding wearily in his own room, for ruin was impending, and the secret he had

hidden successfully so long must soon be revealed.

He sat alone thinking how two-and-twenty years before, he and Ralph Atherton had looked forward hopefully to life, with high resolutions for the future, how Ralph in spite of the keenness of his sorrow, had succeeded at least in being brave and true, while he had utterly and hopelessly failed.

He had been false to the past, false to the memory of a noble friendship, false to the remembrance of a pure love ; he had made a sordid marriage, he had yielded up the indulgence of his nobler faculties for the sake of Stock Exchange gambling, he had speculated wildly and failed, he had attempted to repair failure by fraud, and the end of it all was that he was a man tired of life, daunted by repeated failure, and humiliated by the certainty that a few weeks must bring upon him ruin and disgrace.

Years before he had embezzled Maud's fortune, trusting to chance for the means of returning

it. But the contingencies he looked for never came, and when Ralph Atherton died, he had already begun to despair of ever retrieving the past.

But when he saw Maud, whose beauty recalled so vividly the face of Beatrice Genari, and grew to love her more tenderly, a passionately resolve had sprung up in his mind that she should not lose any portion of her fortune, he would make fresh efforts to gain money, and with such a cause surely he *must* be successful. This was the explanation of his conduct since Maud had lived in his house, of the dread that mingled with his affection for her, of his abstracted moods, and of his refusal to recognise any attachment between Arthur and Maud, lest thereby his secret should be discovered.

But his attempts had failed, and nothing lay before him but ruin and disgrace. Maud's fortune must be paid her in a few weeks now, and he had made arrangements for this to be done, but in

order to do this he had been guilty of further fraud, converting securities placed in his hands for safety, into cash, to the amount required, one hundred and five thousand pounds.

What refuge or hope remained to him? There was no one in whom he could confide. His friend Ralph Atherton was dead, his wife was utterly incapable of helping or comforting anyone. Blanche had not sufficient strength of character to meet an emergency like this. Maud could have helped him, and had tried to do so, but it was she whom he had first wronged, and apart from the shame of telling her this, he knew her forgiveness would be granted freely, if for no other reason than that he had once been her father's friend. Her answer to his confession would be he knew to waive all claim to her fortune, and deeply as he had sinned he could not bear the thought of what seemed like a second robbery.

"No," he said, gloomily to himself, "there

can be no hope for me—she will be rich, though I have ruined others to pay back my thefts, but for me there is nothing remaining but beggary and shame.”

CHAPTER XIV.

“ *Hermia*.—God speed fair Helena whither away ?

Helena.—Call you me fair ? that fair again unsay—
Demetrius loves your fair ; oh happy fair,
Your eyes are lodestars and your tongue’s
sweet air.”

Shakespeare.

(*A Midsummer Night’s Dream.*)

WHEN the play was over, Mr. Corvette the manager informed the people that Miss Ashford was compelled, by circumstances of an imperative nature, to postpone her next appearance on the stage for an indefinite period. There was a hum of general disappointment among the

audience, but as the deprivation fell most heavily upon other people they bore it with praiseworthy resignation, and dispersed without any violent expression of disapproval.

Edith did not wait to see how the announcement was received; but directly the play was ended hurried away to the house in Fleet Street.

Excited and impulsive as she was, she knew perfectly well the probable consequences of her determination. Apart from the grosser scandals that would no doubt be circulated, there would be plenty of people to shake their heads with an oppressive sense of moral rectitude, and say that her conduct was an unmaidenly attempt by awakening gratitude to inveigle Arthur into marriage, but though her face flushed at the thought with a woman's instinctive dread of calumny, she had but one answer to it—"I love him passionately—my life is nothing, but his is of highest worth to many—if any sacrifice of mine will save him, he shall not die."

When she reached Arthur's home he was asleep, and Mrs. Leel was watching beside his bed, as calmly as though danger and sorrow had no place in life.

Edith observed her narrowly as she sat reading, wondering if she had ever been less calm and passionless. She was a woman of about five-and-forty, with rather fine dark eyes, and hair that was almost white. There was nothing else remarkable about her appearance except an expression of quiet sadness. Her speech was that of a lady, and her hands were small and white—probably she had had a personal share once in the ordinary aims and longings of women, but if there had ever been such a time it was long ago. Now she was merely a nurse, whose reticence appeared to repudiate the idea of possessing any but a professional individuality.

Yet there was something very gentle and motherly in her furtive glance at Edith.

With that strange power of intuition in all love

affairs most women seem to possess, she had guessed half Edith's story already. They sat silently together for some minutes, at last Edith said in a voice very unlike the one that had thrilled so many people that evening by its beauty—

“ You have seen much of illness—tell me this—do you think he will die ? ”

Mrs. Leel made the usual rejoinder of it being impossible to tell.

“ Do not evade my question,” said Edith, earnestly. “ If you tell me there is no hope, I shall not faint or shrink from watching, but I implore you to tell me the truth.”

“ There is hope,” said the nurse, slowly, “ but he is very—very ill—if you are brave you will prepare your mind for the worst.”

Edith was not unused to sickness, for her mother had had no one else to tend her in several illnesses of a serious nature, but no training could have taught her the unwearied vigilance with which she watched day and night by Arthur's

bed. Dr. Linley called every day to see the patient, and observed with admiring wonder, the way this girl of nineteen ministered in the sick room, her quick perception of the right thing to do, her quiet self-control, and her apparent incapability of fatigue.

“ You must take more rest Miss Ashford,” he would say, “ you are overstraining your powers as Mr. Calverley has done ; if you do not take care it will be with the same result.”

But Edith always shook her head hopelessly. “ I *cannot* sleep,” she would say, hurriedly, and then would ask how Arthur was, with an eagerness it seemed cruelty to disappoint.

And so day after day—(year after year it seemed to Edith) passed, and still her own belief as to what the end would be, rarely wavered. “ He will not die,” she would murmur to herself, “ his life is too precious—his work too incomplete, his time of death must still be far away.”

And then she would think of Maud with a

bitterness of hatred that was almost a luxury. Ever since her babyhood she had heard her mother speak about her sister Beatrice, and had often longed to know her or her children, that she might love them too. But with the discovery that she had a cousin living came also the knowledge of the hopelessness of her love.

She used to picture what Maud was like, to wonder whether she really cared for him with anything more than a common-place feeling. I am afraid in her jealousy poor Edith would almost have preferred that Maud should be unworthy of Arthur's love. She might have some ground then for a hatred in which she felt she *must* indulge.

But the strength of her love and her hatred were both to be tested.

One morning when she asked Dr. Linley the ordinary question, he said, instead of giving her the usual answer—

“To-day will be the crisis. If he lives through to-night, he will probably recover, but I cannot

conceal from you that the danger is very great."

"If he lives through the night;" Edith mechanically repeated the words to herself, and tried to realise what they meant. She knew none of Arthur's relations whom she could apprise of his danger, his mother was dead, his father cared very little for him, he had no brothers or sisters, and there was no one among his friends of whom she knew, who would care to risk the danger of infection for the sake of a possible recognition and a word of dying farewell.

No one?

Yes, there was someone. Edith had heard Arthur's delirious ravings, and she knew what was the deepest power in his life. Through the long weary days and sleepless nights he had talked almost incessantly, but whatever his theme he linked it with the name of the woman whom he loved—the name of Maud Atherton.

From the unconnected nonsense he had talked,

Edith had learnt more clearly than any studied phrases could have told her, what Maud was to him, and for days the struggle in her mind had been, whether she should tell Maud of this illness of Arthur's or not.

It was not easy to decide. She hated Maud too much to yield her the privilege of serving Arthur willingly—she had sacrificed everything to obtain this post, why should she share it with anyone? Besides, Maud might not have the courage to defy the opinion of society as she had done, and then her sacrifice would be useless and absurd.

But on the other hand Arthur's incoherent words seemed to plead: "I love her—will you not let me touch her hand once more before I die?" And Dr. Linley's words had been "if he lives through the night, he will probably recover." But if not? If consciousness returned to him for a few moments, would he not look round for the face he loved best? and if he did not see it would

not his look of disappointment haunt her for ever?

The struggle in Edith's heart was a long one, but love was stronger than hate and gained the victory.

"Mrs. Leel you have asked me to go out every day," said Edith, "and I have refused, but I will go this morning for half-an-hour, Mr. Calverley is asleep and Dr. Linley said there was no danger for two or three hours."

"Do, Miss Ashford," said the nurse, "you are killing yourself by this anxiety."

So Edith went out into the streets for the first time since her return from the theatre. She was giddy and weak from her long want of fresh air, sleep, and exercise; but in this as in everything else her strength of purpose sustained her, and she ran rather than walked till she reached Mr. Arvale's house.

"Is Miss Atherton at home?"

"Yes, miss," replied the footman, in a

languishing voice, as who should say, "do you suppose any other consideration would induce me to stay in the house."

"Tell her I wish to speak to her alone on a matter of the deepest importance."

"What name, miss?"

"Never mind my name—tell her I must see her at once," and Edith slipped some money into the man's hand.

He showed her into the drawing-room and departed to execute the commission with unusual alacrity.

Maud was alone upstairs reading, and was rather amused by the footman's description of the visitor, but the mysterious stranger, whoever she was, had spoken of the urgency of her disclosure, and Maud hurried down stairs immediately. When she entered the room and recognised in the visitor, Miss Ashford, whose acting had fascinated her so strangely, she uttered an exclamation of surprise, but less at this

circumstance than at the change three weeks had made in Edith's face.

"Miss Ashford," said Maud, recovering herself, "pray be seated. Can I do anything for you," she added hurriedly, "you look agitated. Are you ill?"

"No," answered Edith, "I am not ill, or if I am it does not signify. But I come from Mr. Calverley."

Maud's face flushed, and her voice trembled with eagerness as she said—

"Is anything the matter? Is he ill?"

Edith felt a terrible kind of delight in making this girl, who looked so beautiful and happy, feel some of the misery of which her own life was full.

"Yes," she answered bitterly, "he is very ill—he is dying—is that anything to you?"

She was not prepared for the rapid change in Maud's face, or the thrilling earnestness of her reply.

“ He is more to me than he can be to any one else on earth, more to me than anything the world could give—more to me than life itself. Do you know where he is ? ”

“ Yes,”

“ Then take me there ; if you will wait one minute I will be ready.”

“ Do you ask me no questions ? ” said Edith.

“ No,” answered Maud, “ time is too precious to waste in words. You shall tell me everything afterwards.”

Maud ran upstairs to the library, where Mr. Arvale was writing. She was disappointed at finding his wife with him, feeling in no mood for a passage at arms with that lady, but her errand admitted of no delay.

“ Mr. Arvale,” she said quickly, “ I have just learned that Arthur is very ill—I must go to him at once.”

Mrs. Arvale uttered a slight scream of horror at the suggestion ; it was criminal from two

points of view, in the first place it was clearly an act of love, in the second it was altogether unusual.

“ I must go to him,” said Maud, firmly, “ at once, in a short time it will be unnecessary for me to ask your permission, but you cannot refuse me a request like this.”

“ Cannot refuse it,” echoed Mrs. Arvale, “ for you to go in this improper manner to a young man’s house ! Only an irreligious girl like you, Miss Atherton, could have suggested such a thing. Of course you will not dream of consenting to such a proceeding, Horace.”

But Horace Arvale dared not resist the pleading of Maud’s beautiful eyes, even if he had not known any attempt to thwart her would be useless, so he turned in his most irritable manner to his wife and said—

“ Allow me to give or withhold consent as I choose. Yes, Maud, if Mr. Calverley is dangerously ill, I will not attempt to separate you from

each other. As you say my authority over you is virtually over, but if it were otherwise my action would be the same."

Utterly disgusted at the depravity of all with whom she was connected, Mrs. Arvale retired in disdainful anger from the room, leaving her husband and Maud alone.

"Thank you," said Maud gratefully, "for your kindness. It would have pained me very much to have been compelled to disregard your authority. I shall return as soon as I possibly can, but I must go at once for I have not a moment to lose. Good bye."

She held out her hand as she spoke, and Horace Arvale raised it to his lips.

"Good bye darling," he said hoarsely, "God bless you."

At any other time Maud would have noticed the singular earnestness of his manner, but her mind was wholly absorbed by the thought of Arthur, and she hurried away as little suspecting

the cause of his agitation, as she suspected the truth that her parting from him was for ever.

Soon even to Edith's impatience Maud re-entered the drawing-room.

"I am ready now," she said, "we will go at once."

Mr. Arvale's carriage was waiting at the door, and they drove rapidly away together.

When they reached their destination, they found Arthur still asleep, and having prevailed upon Mrs. Leel to rest for a few minutes. Maud and Edith sat in the quiet room together.

And then Edith told Maud all, for even the secret of her heart, which she strove to hide, was clear to her listener, but Maud's nature was too large for jealousy. The knowledge that this girl loved Arthur awoke deep sympathy in her heart, for her own intense nature told her how terrible the sense of the hopelessness of love must be.

"You have acted nobly," she whispered, (throughout the conversation they spoke in

whispers lest they should awake Arthur) "and I shall be always grateful to you."

"You must not speak to me like that—you must not be gentle and affectionate to me."

"Why not?"

Edith could not answer, she meant because she had been hating Maud all the time, and she could not own that without confessing her secret.

"Edith," said Maud, after a short silence, "you must not repel me in this way, you have done this for the reason that I would have done it, if I had known that he was ill—because you love him."

"I do love him," said Edith, "and for that reason I have hated you."

"It is natural you should feel like this," said Maud, gently, "I seem to have stolen the gladness out of your life, but you will not always think so. And see," she added, pointing to the bed, "this is no time for envying each other, if he dies my heart will break."

Further speech was interrupted by the entrance of Dr. Linley. He had gained too complete a mastery over himself to betray surprise; but though he bowed to Maud as though he had fully expected to see her, in reality her presence greatly astonished him.

“This is very extraordinary,” he thought, “instead of having one beautiful nurse he’s going to have two it seems. This brown-haired girl is handsomer than the actress — there’s more character in her face.”

“I shall stay here till he wakes,” he whispered to Edith, “but I think it would be better for you and your friend to leave the room till I call you; we must not over excite him.”

“Yes, you are right, we will go into the next room,” said Maud; “but you will call us—if there is any—any—change.”

“Yes,” said the physician quietly, “I promise that.”

The two girls went into the next room and

waited, how long they never knew, but it seemed to them hours; at last Mrs. Leel came in and said that Arthur was awake and conscious, and could see one of them without any danger.

“You go in, Edith,” whispered Maud, “it is your right after your long self-denial.”

“No, Maud,” said Edith, firmly, “yours is the face he loves, and there is no right equal to that.”

Then Maud and Edith kissed each other, and Maud went into Arthur’s room alone.

CHAPTER XV.

“Miranda.—You look wearily.

*Ferdinand.—No noble mistress ; ’tis fresh morning
with me,*

When you are by at night.”

Shakespeare.

(The Tempest.)

“ M^{AUD!} ”

“ Arthur ! ”

How much can be expressed by the utterance of a name. Arthur thought so as he looked up with a sense of quiet enjoyment at the beautiful face bending over him.

They clasped hands then in silence, and Arthur

stroked Maud's rich brown hair with a faint misgiving that he was still dreaming.

"If I were a little stronger," said Arthur, after a minute or two, "I should be in a state of intense astonishment, but that would need an intellectual effort of which I am quite incapable, so I am prepared to take everything as a matter of course. At present all the events of my life seem to have got shuffled like a pack of cards, but I always thought you were a witch Maud, so doubtless it is your work, but explain the feats of your sorcery."

"You have been very ill Arthur," Maud began, when he interrupted her.

"So I inferred from the state of my hands, the fact that I haven't strength enough to sit upright, and the words of Dr. Linley, confound him," added Arthur with remarkable energy, considering his condition, "I haven't kissed you for nearly three years Maud, and how am I to do it, with that medical refrigerator in the room?"

Maud's low laugh of intense enjoyment sounded even more musical than its echo had done to his fancy during the long separation.

"You are very ungrateful," she said, "Dr. Linley has saved your life."

"How long have I been ill Maud?"

"Three weeks."

Arthur was fast becoming exhausted by the effort he had made, but astonishment roused him, he gave a bewildered look at Maud, and repeated—

"How long?"

"Three weeks."

"Have you nursed me, darling?"

"No," said Maud, "Edith Ashford has nursed you, she has acted nobly—she renounced everything to come, and——"

"I am sorry to interrupt a conversation that appears so interesting," said Dr. Linley, "but my patient must not be excited."

"If I were a little stronger," said Arthur, in a voice whose weakness contrasted ludicrously

with his words, "I would defy you, Dr. Linley, but as my hands are tied by gratitude, as well as by powerlessness, you must conquer, but in a week or two I shall certainly 'cast physic to the dogs,' like Macbeth."

The sight of Maud had reawakend something of his old energy, but he was still very weak, and was quite exhausted by the effort of talking, he sank back again on his pillow, and in a few minutes was asleep.

"He will recover," said the physician to Maud and Edith as he left the house, "he is very weak still, and will require great care for another week or two, but the real danger has passed."

Dr. Linley's words were literally verified. From that hour Arthur recovered rapidly. In two days time he was able to get up, and shortly afterwards he was able to go out for a drive, in a very little time he would be as strong as ever.

As he grew stronger they told him all. Maud and Edith lived in some apartments Dr. Linley

had found for them a few minutes' walk from Arthur's house, and with them was little Nellie Yempson, who having shed an incredible number of tears during Arthur's illness, was now in an equally rapturous state of delight. By this arrangement Maud, Edith and Nellie, spent the greater part of the day in Arthur's society.

What happy hours they were. To Arthur they seemed enchanted. Charlie Alcester having undertaken the temporary editorship of the 'London Review,' he was relieved from all anxiety, and those May days freighted with returning strength for him, and spent in the companionship of Maud, seemed more like the happiness of the fortunate prince in the children's 'Fairy Legends,' than any part of the stern battle of life. To Maud they were not less sweet, while Nellie quite reconstructed her views of life, deciding that the world was a delightful playground after all.

But to Edith?

The gladness in her case was strangely mingled with pain. She had never been so much in Arthur's society, nor had his manner ever been so kind and gentle. He was grateful to her—deeply grateful—for what she had done, and both he and Maud showed this in a thousand delicate ways. She had left off hating her cousin for the simple reason that she could not help being fascinated by her and loving her as everyone else did. Maud and Arthur were never selfish in their love for each other, parading their affection—‘as the manner of some is’—as though caresses were not too sacred to be performed in public; on the contrary they persisted in regarding the circle as incomplete without her, but gentleness, courtesy, gratitude, friendship, were not what she yearned for.

She longed for love, and day by day showed more clearly that this was hopeless. As she saw more of Maud she began to understand Arthur's worship for her. Edith could have sat at his

feet always, have loved him ever, and have obeyed his slightest wish; but Maud could do more than this—she could be his teacher as well as his pupil, she could supply what he lacked, she could by her love lead him on to higher attainment, by her beauty of face, and heart, and mind inspire him to continued effort, and by her bright companionship sweeten all his toil.

But Edith never betrayed the pain she felt by a word or gesture; to all appearance she was perfectly calm and happy, while she was forming a resolution of which they little dreamed.

In about a week Arthur had so far regained his old strength, that Dr. Linley advised his going away for a few weeks to the sea-side.

They sat together in Hyde Park discussing the matter.

“As to weeks,” said Arthur, “I shall do nothing of the kind; but a few days by the sea would certainly do me good. Let me see, how old are you Maud?”

“My birthday that is to emancipate me from the thralldom of Horace Arvale’s guardianship,” said Maud, gaily; “this wonderful twenty-first birthday of mine that I have been looking forward to so long is in a week exactly. I’m glad I’m older than you, Edith, it gives me the privilege to lecture you.”

“Then I will go away for a week,” said Arthur, “and next Tuesday I will call on Horace Arvale, and claim you for my wife.”

It was the first time Edith had heard him speak of marriage, and her hands that were playing with little Nellie Yempson’s hair trembled, though her face was perfectly composed.

“Dear Arthur,” said Maud after a moment’s pause, “I have wished over and over again that the fortune I am to receive formally next Tuesday had never been bequeathed to me, but now I am glad very glad for your sake—we shall be able to do so much good for the poor, and to advance in some degree your high social aims, for it will be all yours since it is mine.”

“I cannot look at it in that light,” said Arthur, “it may be selfish, seeing how much good can be done by money, but I heartily wish you had not a penny in the world. I am rich enough to give you a home now, and if you were ruined before next Tuesday you would gain the only charm you lack, but I won’t spoil the prospect before me by dwelling on this.”

So it was decided for them to disperse that day. Arthur to go to the Isle of Wight, Edith and Nellie to return to Kensington, and Maud to spend the last week of her minority at the house of Horace Arvale.

When Arthur had gone, Maud and Edith walked slowly back to Fleet Street to make the necessary arrangements for carrying out this plan.

Little Nellie Yempson, who was also with them prattled on in her childish fashion all the way, but Maud and Edith were unusually silent scarcely exchanging a word.

When they were alone together however, Maud said in that caressing way of hers, which was always irresistible.

“ You don’t hate me now. Do you Edith ? ”

To her great surprise Edith Ashford put her head on Maud’s shoulder and sobbed like a broken hearted child.

“ No,” she cried, “ I have tried to hate you but I cannot. You can make anyone love you if you choose.”

“ Then dear Edith, will you listen to something I have to say. Will you try to do something which would make me very happy ? ”

“ What is it, Maud ? ”

“ It is not easy for me to say what I mean,” said Maud, thoughtfully, “ we have known each other for little more than a week, but you know that fancy in Festus, ‘ that we should count life by heart throbs,’ and a day’s intimacy like ours brings hearts nearer together, than a year’s acquaintance of evening parties and morning

calls. Then we are cousins, our mothers loved each other most tenderly—we have been brought together by a strange chain of circumstances, I am vain enough to think we are not unlike in disposition, we both have the same hot Italian blood in our veins at all events. Well, for all these reasons we ought to be friends in all truth and trust. But then ——”

“Go on dear,” said Edith, for Maud hesitated.

“We are unfortunately brought into something like rivalry. I know what love is to you from what it is to me, and I will not talk the common cant about forgetting this and loving again, for I believe with a nature like yours such a thing would be impossible, but I want this love of yours, and this is what I find it difficult to express, to be a reason for binding us together, not for estranging us.”

Edith had left off crying. Tears were very unusual to her, and it was only the delicate sympathy and winning gentleness of Maud’s voice

that had broken down her wonted self-control, but though she soon recovered her composure, she still nestled in Maud's arms like a weary child that longs for comfort.

“ I am so happy, and the prospect before me is so hopeful,” Maud continued, “ of congenial work, reciprocated love, and bright enjoyment, that it is easy for me to love you. It is not easy for you seeing all this to love me, but will you not try ? The dearest wish of your heart I know is that Arthur should be happy, but will you not try to believe that with all my faults the object of my life will be to make him so ? My happiness is purchased by your pain, will you let me try, knowing the secret of your heart to atone for this ? I do not pity you ; gifted as you are with beauty and genius, pity would be absurd and insulting, but I feel the deepest sympathy for you, and if I could gladden your life a little after saddening it so much, it would make my heart much lighter.”

Edith raised her head now, and looked at Maud with an expression of strangely mingled feeling, then she said very slowly, but with no faltering or indecision—

“ If there is a pure heart in the world, darling, it is yours—if there are gentleness and truth in earth or heaven they are in your breast, no one could have spoken more gently than you have done, there is no heart anywhere beating with more womanly tenderness than yours, and for that I will be grateful to you always—I will love you in my heart of hearts, and I will never kneel in prayer without whispering your name to God.”

Maud could not reply ; she was fascinated by Edith’s words, as she had been by her rendering of Juliet’s character, the first night she had seen the young actress, little dreaming how the threads of their different lives were to be interwoven.

“ Will that satisfy you ? ” said Edith, finding her companion did not speak.

"Satisfy me," Maud replied, with assumed lightness, "you have promised me a thousand times more than I asked, and a million times more than I deserve. But I am avaricious in love, and so I accept it gratefully. And for my own part I promise ——"

"Promise me this," interrupted Edith, "that you will believe the words I have just spoken to be true—that you will never fancy me envying you, or cherishing a bitter thought towards you, that if anything should separate us—you will think of me as gently and lovingly as you can."

"I promise all that," said Maud, "and much more. But why do you talk about separation, Edith? What is there but death that can ever separate us?"

"There are so many changes in life," said Edith, hurriedly. "We cannot read the future, and loving hands are always being unclasped."

Maud looked wonderingly at her with a half

belief that she was withholding something. But without giving Maud the opportunity to question her concerning this, Edith threw her arms round Maud's neck, kissed her passionately, and left her.

And in this way they parted—for ever.

CHAPTER XVI.

The world sheds few tears over the graves of her heroes. A handful of flowers—a few phrases of florid prose or elegiac verse, and a marble monument, are reward enough she fancies for genius, agony and toil. But when the men who have failed in the battle die, she lays them in the bosom of the earth and forgets them before the upturned mould is dry.

“ I AM very glad my imprisonment will be over in a week,” thought Maud, as she started home once more ; “ life in my guardian’s house has always had something of the condensed dullness of a November morning, and now that Blanche is married it would be intolerable. Dear little

Blanche, if she's half as happy as she deserves to be, hers will be one of the brightest homes in England."

Maud walked rapidly along, enjoying the fresh morning air and the bright June sunshine. Frown not, oh, cynical country reader accustomed to associate the name of sunshine with grassy valleys, laughing rivulets and dewy flowers, the sun *does* shine and the air *is* fresh now and then even in London.

"Mr. Arvale grows sadder and more abstracted every day," thought Maud, "if only he would have confided his secret to me, perhaps I might have lightened it for him, for he loved my mother and he says I am like her. I wonder what his secret is, some remembrance of having wronged some one I fancy, for mere sorrow could never have crushed his spirit so utterly; if this were really so I wish it were I whom he had wronged. Forgiveness would be so easy and so sweet."

Musing in this fashion she reached his house

and started to see that all the blinds were down, though it was four o'clock in the afternoon.

Her knock at the door was answered not by the footman but by her own maid, who was dressed, Maud saw in a moment, in deep mourning.

"Is anything the matter, Fanny? Has anything happened since I went away?"

"Yes, miss," said the girl, quietly, "something very terrible has happened. Mr. Lincoln is in the library, miss; I was told to say he wished to speak to you directly you came in, if you please."

Mr. Lincoln was the family solicitor. Perceiving at once that whatever sorrow had fallen upon the house she would learn it from him, Maud stayed no longer to question the girl, but without even waiting to take off her hat and gloves she entered her guardian's library.

Mr. Lincoln, a grave elderly gentleman, with a pleasant face and long grey hair, was sitting alone at the writing-table surrounded by

documents; there was in addition to his usual composed manner, Maud thought, an air of having been engaged in this occupation for some time.

He rose as Maud entered the room and placed a chair for her. At the same time he uttered some common-place words of greeting, and gave one glance of keen scrutiny at her face.

"I know nothing of what has happened, Mr. Lincoln," said Maud, in answer to his look. "I have only just entered the house, and have been absent a week. But I see that something terrible has happened. What is it?"

"You are trembling, Miss Atherton," said the lawyer, gently, "before we have any conversation together let me give you a glass of wine."

"No thank you."

"A glass of water then," he poured it out as he spoke, and Maud drank a little to satisfy him.

"Please tell me everything, Mr. Lincoln," she said, "it was only the suddenness of the

shock that frightened me, I am strong enough to hear anything now."

Mr. Lincoln nodded approval, he had a vague conviction that beautiful girls always fainted on the slightest suggestion, and the prospect had made him nervous.

"There has been a serious accident," he said, and Mr. Arvale——"

"Is he killed," she asked quickly, thinking of the closed house, and the crape the servant had worn.

"Yes—the accident was fatal."

Maud sat looking at the lawyer's quiet face without the power to speak or move. A week ago she had left her guardian well and strong, and his parting words had been even more kind and affectionate than usual. She experienced the sense of having lost something that had become dearer to her than she had ever known, she felt a quick sympathy for poor Blanche, and stronger than either thought was the remembrance the

lawyer's words awakened of the darkest moment in her life, nearly three years ago, when she grasped in all its bitter reality—the truth that she was fatherless.

“ Poor Blanche,” she said at last, “ it is well she has her husband to comfort her.”

The thought of poor little Blanche made the tears start to Maud's eyes.

“ How did the accident you speak of happen ? ” she asked, after a minute's silence.

“ He was returning home from the city as usual,” said the lawyer, “ three days ago ; it was always his custom to come by train to the station near here, and walk the rest of the way. On this occasion he was crossing the road within a hundred yards of his own house, when a carriage was passing rather rapidly. He had plenty of time to get out of the way, but he was in one of his abstracted moods. I dare say you have noticed them in him lately, Miss Atherton.”

“ I have done so often, especially in the last few months.”

“ Exactly. Well, he appears to have been quite unconscious of his surroundings, and when the coachman shouted to him to get out of the way, he started and in his attempt to do so, missed his footing somehow, probably from the sudden shock, and fell beneath the horses’ feet. The coachman had attempted to rein in the horses, but it was too late. Death was almost instantaneous. There were many people in the road at that moment, and they all confirm this statement.—The accident was due entirely to Mr. Arvale’s absence of mind.”

“ He was my father’s friend—he loved my mother—he was kind to me.” Maud thought there were not many who would regret Horace Arvale’s death as she did.

“ Mrs. Arvale and I,” continued the lawyer, “ devoted this morning and the whole of yesterday to the examination of his papers. Having done

so together, we locked away the important ones, and the comparatively unimportant documents I am attending to now."

He pointed to the writing-table as he spoke.

"Of the result of our investigations I should like to acquaint you as soon as you can make it convenient to listen, for you are to a certain extent an interested party, and Mrs. Arvale has empowered me to act as I choose in this matter."

"I will listen now then," said Maud, "you have told me the saddest part of your tidings. Anything relating to myself you may have to tell, will affect me very little."

The lawyer rose to see that the door was shut, and that there was no danger of their being overheard. Having satisfied himself on this point, he sat down again and said in a lower tone—

"Miss Atherton, you know, I believe, that for many years I have been Mr. Arvale's solicitor, I believed him to be a wealthy man, and indeed there is a will of his in my office now bequeathing

property to the extent of nearly two hundred thousand pounds. Lawyers see strange things sometimes, but I must confess to some unprofessional surprise, (knowing this and believing that our relationships together were always frankly confidential) to find that Horace Arvale has died a bankrupt."

"A bankrupt?" repeated Maud, wonderingly.

"Yes, and not merely that, but one who has been guilty of fraud and forgery. I need not trouble you with legal details," said the lawyer, rather wistfully, as though the least inducement would cause him to do so, "but you know he was sole executor of Sir James Atherton's will. His power over your property was almost unlimited, and that power he abused. About twelve years ago he contrived to get possession of your fortune for some speculation he had then in hand."

Maud's face was as composed now as the lawyer's; mere money losses, or the possibility of them, seemed to her of very little importance.

“The speculation failed,” continued the lawyer, “and Mr. Arvale was unable to replace the money. Had the Baronet’s will been properly drawn up, this fraud on your guardian’s part would have been almost impossible; but as it was he not only was enabled to embezzle the money, but he was perfectly safe from detection till you were of age and could demand the sum in full. He sent yearly statements to your father of the property—how it was invested, and what interest had accrued; but these statements were utterly false, in reality the whole of your fortune had been spent.”

Maud listened with a feeling of intense pain and pity to this declaration of her guardian’s unworthiness. For the first time she fully understood many things he had said and done, and his words to her the night she had pleaded for Blanche’s lover were no mystery now.

“Then I am not an heiress after all,” she said calmly, “I am sorry for that for Arthur’s sake.”

“No,” he answered, “you are mistaken. If your money had been properly invested, Sir James Atherton’s bequest would have amounted to one hundred and five thousand pounds. That sum without any deduction whatever will be yours absolutely next Tuesday.”

“But I do not understand,” said Maud. “I thought you said the whole of the money had been embezzled.”

“Yes; but ever since Mr. Arvale first knew you he has been making strenuous efforts to repay the money he had obtained possession of. Looking over his private papers I find evidence of an activity that astonishes me. He has speculated with remarkable boldness and judgment; and but for the failure of an enterprise three months ago, in which he was deeply involved, he would probably have succeeded. But the undertaking *did* fail, and six weeks ago he knew that he must either make a hundred thousand pounds before your birthday or throw up the cards altogether.”

“You surely are not going to tell me that by any kind of financial gambling he did gain the money?” said Maud.

“He did gain the money; but it was by forgery and fraud. He raised the required amount chiefly by converting documents intrusted to his care, as securities for loans or for other purposes, into cash. By these means, the day before he died he paid one hundred and five thousand pounds to your credit at the Bank of England. I congratulate you, Miss Atherton, on having saved your fortune while so many people will be ruined.”

“You said he died a bankrupt,” said Maud, “how much did he owe?”

“His liabilities amount to two hundred thousand pounds,” said the lawyer; “against this we have property, speaking in round numbers, to the value of ninety thousand pounds. This leaves, of course, a deficiency of one hundred and ten thousand pounds. This is merely an estimate,

of course, but it is a careful one, and will not be far wrong I am sure."

"Then if I were to renounce all claim to my fortune the debts could all be paid, and no one else would suffer?" said Maud.

"Undoubtedly so."

"Then you may make your arrangements with that understanding," she said, "for nothing shall induce me to touch one penny of the money."

"Surely you are not serious, Miss Atherton?"

"I am perfectly serious," she replied. "This is not a question of generous sacrifice, it is one of simple justice. This money you speak of is not mine—mine was stolen long ago—but even if it were mine, I would far sooner renounce it than bring shame upon the memory of my father's friend. Ah, me!" she added to herself, "if he had only told me this how freely I would have forgiven him."

"But really, Miss Atherton, I do not think

you ought to make so large a sacrifice as this. If you are resolved not to gain by other people's losses you might take your place with the rest of the creditors, and throw your legacy into the estate. That would involve the renunciation of thirty or forty thousand pounds, but it would be more reasonable than giving up everything."

"This does not appear to me a question admitting of discussion," said Maud, firmly, "the course before me is a perfectly plain one, and I shall not hesitate to adopt it."

"What do you suppose Mr. Calverley will say to this decision of yours?" enquired the lawyer, who knew perfectly well the whole history of their engagement.

"It will make no difference to him," said Maud, quietly, "he has said many times that he wished I had been penniless, and he will be glad I know to hear that his wish is fulfilled; but if I thought it would influence him or make him regret his choice, I would release him from his

engagement sooner than do what I hold to be wrong."

"Will you not at least consult him?" said Mr. Lincoln, glancing at the diamonds that sparkled so brilliantly on the little white hand.

"No," Maud replied, "I give him freely love, reverence and submission—but this is a question not of inclination or expediency, but of right and wrong. No one can alter that. I have decided what to do, and on no consideration will I swerve from my resolve."

She looked very beautiful the lawyer thought as he watched her face in which the firmness of her resolution was clearly expressed.

"Arthur will be here next Tuesday, Mr. Lincoln," she said, "and he will arrange everything with you, I don't want anything to be done recklessly in my girlish fashion, but I tell you now of my decision that you may know how to act."

She rose as she spoke, and with an apology for having detained him so long, left him alone.

The funeral took place next day. When the blinds were drawn up again, and the sunshine was admitted once more, the house soon resumed its old appearance. Love had never had much place in Mrs. Arvale's nature, and she bore her loss with very touching resignation. A decent show of sorrow she kept up for the sake of 'society,' but this was like her widow's cap, a thing to be donned and doffed at pleasure.

As for the servants they had liked him very well, he had been a kind and indulgent master, had paid them liberally and rarely complained; but seeing that his wife's spirits were so little affected, it can scarcely be wondered at that his servants suffered little from mental depression. There were a few remarks about Horace Arvale made in the servants' hall, and a great deal of wonder expressed as to their future prospects, and then his name almost ceased to be mentioned. On the Stock Exchange it was the same—a few conjectures as to the probable amount of his

wealth, a few bets about the possible legatees, and Horace Arvale was forgotten.

But Maud who knew the good in him as well as the evil, who recognised what he might have been, and was gentle and forgiving to what he actually was, did not forget him. He had sinned deeply, but she who had suffered most from his abuse of the trust committed to him, thought of him more gently and tenderly than anyone, recognising that to which the world is always so blind—the unfulfilled possibilities of a life.

God grant when the record of life is ended for you and for me, when the history of repeated failure and disappointment is over, and our places are fitted by others, that there may be one pure hearted woman by whom we shall not be forgotten, who will hide our faults by her pity, and cherish the thought of whatever good was in us in her sweet remembrance for ever.

CHAPTER XVII.

“ And I must even survive this last adieu
And bear with life, to love and pray for you,”
Byron.

ON the morning of her twenty-first birthday, Maud stood at the window watching for Arthur's arrival. The old Elverley gladness seemed to have come back to her, as she stood with the June sunlight streaming upon her luxuriant hair, as lovingly as it had done three years ago beside the river Elva.

The morning's post had brought her several letters of congratulation. Blanche Cradley, (as

she signed herself with an immense flourish, expressive of the dignity of her new name) had written from Paris. She did not know yet about her father's death, Maud having prevailed on Mrs. Arvale not to mar the happiness of Blanche's wedding tour by tidings so terrible. So she wrote in the highest spirits, and with a vivacity that would have surprised (and doubtless offended) her excellent mother.

Sarah had written too—an ill-spelt, ill-written letter, over which Maud had laughed and cried in a very unphilosophical manner. The other letters she had been too impatient to open, and she held them in her hand, as she stood by the window watching for Arthur.

She had not long to wait. In a few minutes he bounded up the steps with a rapidity that considering his late weakness was rather surprising, and would probably have been considered by Dr. Linley very imprudent; then there was a very impatient knock that positively frightened

the languid footman, and in another moment Maud was in Arthur's arms.

If parting is sweet sorrow, reunion is doubly sweet gladness. The saddest paths to tread are not the rough and thorny ones that must be trodden before anything high or noble can be attained, but the dusty roads that lead to no haven of rest, that are long and changeless, brightened never by the shining of a star.

"Are you better, Arthur," said Maud, after a greeting concerning which I do not intend to be explicit.

"Better," said Arthur, "if I had come on crutches, I should have thrown them away as ridiculously superfluous, at the sight of your face. Positively Maud you are looking more beautiful than I have ever seen you look before, though if anyone yesterday had dared to suggest the possibility of such a thing being done by anybody, I should have pitched him into the Solent."

"You have not come here to pay me sailor-like

compliments, I hope," said Maud, laughing.

"No, I have come to claim you as my wife, and the occasion is such a glorious one that I have been rather annoyed not to find banners streaming and a triumphal arch erected. Is Mr. Arvale at home?"

Maud uttered an involuntary expression of surprise.

"Then you have not heard—" she began, when he interrupted her.

"I have heard nothing since I saw you last, darling. What is the matter? I see by your face something has happened."

Then Maud told him everything. He listened with attentive silence till she came to the renunciation of her fortune.

"So I have nothing in the world, Arthur," she began, when he caught her in his arms.

"You have everything in the world that is worth having, and, since you are mine now, so have I. Maud darling, this is the only change

in you that I could bear to hear of without sadness. Not only did the thought of your fortune chafe my pride, but it seemed such a tinsel embellishment to the golden wealth of your heart. We have each other's love, my queen, and a thousand gold mines could yield no such wealth as that."

"I knew you would think like this," said Maud, proudly. "I never would have touched the money if I had been starving, knowing that it meant the ruin of others."

And having renounced a hundred thousand pounds in this precipitate fashion, Maud and Arthur began talking about love and similar absurdities, as though they were the real business of life and money were quite a secondary consideration.

"Maud," said Arthur at last, "it was a base libel that declared your sex to be curious."

"Why, Arthur?"

"Because two letters have been lying unopened

on the table ever since I came, and you have never given them a longing glance."

"I forgot them entirely," said Maud, "but as evidently you are curious concerning them, we'll read them together now. One is from Clara Corrie, the other is in a handwriting I don't know."

"Read Clara's first," said Arthur, "that little gipsy is always entertaining."

Maud broke the seal and read as follows:—

"My Dearest Maud,

"I was twenty-six last week, and among the many sage reflections suitable to an elderly matron like myself, I was reminded that you are five younger; and therefore I arrived without greatly straining my arithmetical powers at the conclusion that you will be of age to-morrow.

"Miss Atherton—a young lady of fortune, the queen of London society—no it's of no use I can't imagine that, I prefer to think of you sitting in the old tree by the Elva reading all kinds of

extraordinary old books that no one else cared for, and what's more I *will* think of you as the Maud of old days, for no one else was ever so—but I will not encourage your vanity, so the sentence must remain unfinished, as great a mystery as—here once more I must break a phrase in two for my imagination is not equal to the effort of producing a simile.”

“What an absurd child she is,” said Maud.

“I agree with the first of those broken sentences profoundly,” Arthur replied, “and I should not find it difficult to finish it.”

“That's an extremely doubtful compliment,” said Maud, “but we are interrupting Clara—she goes on to say some things that are very kind and very foolish, so I won't read them. Then she says—

“You always ask for news, but this time I don't mean to satisfy you though there is much to tell, for I am determined to have you here for some time, and instead of writing, which I hate,

to indulge in talking which I candidly own I love.

“ Maud, if you are married anywhere except in Elverley I will never forgive you. If this threat is not enough to frighten you, I can only add that the whole populations of Elverley and Entwich (men, women and children) think likewise. If you refuse to regard the public opinion and persist in getting married elsewhere, the clergyman who performs the ceremony may hug the pleasant prospect of assassination to his soul, for (I content myself with darkly hinting this) he will never die of old age.

“ Come down here and stay with me, Maud, till your wedding. I will take no refusal; but with all the earnestness and emphasis possible to a woman whose pen splutters and scratches at every other word, I implore, beseech, entreat and command you to come.

“ You must come.

“ You shall come.

“ You will come.

“ Fail at your peril.

“ Given under our hand and seal at Elverley, this twelfth day of June.

“ Clara Corrie.”

“ You must go, Maud,” said Arthur, as Maud finished the letter.

“ I long to see dear old Elverley again,” she said, thoughtfully, “ but——”

“ No,” said Arthur, “ you must not disappoint them all on any account. We have not yet settled the day for our wedding. Will a month from to-day be too soon?”

“ How unreasonable you men are,” said Maud. “ I can’t get everything ready in a month.”

“ Then I’ll give you six weeks,” he answered, “ but not another day on any consideration whatever.”

“ What a tyrannical husband you’ll make,” she said, laughing.

“ I’m glad you’re prepared for such a thing,

for I intend to be so. Do you remember the decree of King Ahasuerus?"

"Yes," said Maud, "but I always sympathised with Vashti."

"I must confess that I do too," said Arthur, "however, that will do for the theme of our first quarrel. The question now is, Will your majesty go down to Elverley, while I buy the palace fire-irons and other necessities? If you will do this, the Reverend Ezeikel shall challenge humanity in his mumbling fashion to bring forth cause or just impediment why we should not be married on the first of August."

"Can you get everything ready by that day, Arthur?"

"Certainly I can. I have mentally arranged everything, even to the house, which I intend to take this afternoon."

"Where is it, Arthur?"

"At Norwood, where I used to live in my extravagant bachelor days before I knew you.

It's a charming little box, and I heard yesterday that it was vacant. Mrs. Blinkum ——"

"Who was Mrs. Blinkum?"

"Nominally my landlady—in reality a sphinx. True to her nature she has suddenly disappeared, whither no one has the faintest idea. But come, you have not promised me yet. You will accept Mrs. Corrie's invitation and go down to Elverley to-morrow?"

"Yes, Arthur."

"Promised in right wifely fashion. I want one more affirmative, Maud, promise that you'll be married on the first of August."

"I hope it's not a precedent for future obedience," said Maud, laughing, "for I'm very fond of having my own way."

"It is a precedent most decidedly, and therefore I am the more anxious to establish it."

Maud made no reply in words, but they settled the question entirely to their mutual satisfaction, and the first of August was decided upon for the wedding-day.

“ There still remains the other letter,” said Arthur.

Maud opened it, laughing at herself for having forgotten, but before she had read many lines the expression of her face changed to one of intense sadness.

“ What is the matter, darling ? ” said Arthur, noting the sudden change in her face.

She handed him the letter. It was in Edith Ashford’s writing, and was as follows :—

“ When I parted from you, darling, you did not think it was for long, but when I kissed you I knew it was for the last time, when I clung to your embrace it was because my head may never again rest upon your breast, when I said farewell I heard in the words—‘ for ever.’

“ Yes, for ever. It is better so. You spoke of our loving each other always, of your trying to make me happy, of the many things we have in common, and these were no idle phrases. I looked into your face, and if there had been

anything there that was not pure and true, I would have flung back your words in scorn, but your heart spoke in your sweet face, and I could not tell you the thought that was in mine.

“ ‘ Let us love each other always ’ you said, and we will do so. If I live to be old I will never forget that, and you have promised not to doubt me, not to fancy that I envy your happiness, or have any thought for you that is not loving.

“ But my life in England is over. I could not go upon the stage again, I could not face large audiences as I have done, or take the withered wreath of fame to bind up a broken heart. And I could not—though I love you always dear heart, doubt not that—I could not bear to see him married, or to act the continual lie of courteous indifference when my heart was full of love.

“ I return to Italy—my mother’s land and my own. Henceforth my life is one of prayer, of ministry to the sick and to the poor—I leave the world for ever, and I wish by all but you and Arthur, to be forgotten.

“ Once I spoke to him of the convent life, and he spoke of it being cowardly to shrink from the strain and struggle of existence, but he added ‘ I dare not bar the convent gate against the cry from a broken heart for admission ;’ my heart is broken, let me leave the world and be forgotten by it.

“ I will not bury myself in the cloister, but there is a sisterhood of whom my mother often spoke, who have made dying lips bless the convent from whence they came, who enter the house of crime and pestilence like angels of hope and rest. To them I will go, perhaps after long patience, discipline and penance I may be one of them and my life useless to myself may be of worth to others.

“ Whoever may judge me harshly you will not. I have loved him—I shall love him always. Women there are they say, who can forget old love and train their hearts to new worship. But I could never do that nor could you.

“ I go from England for ever. Any attempt to

follow me, to induce me to abandon my resolve would be in vain. Let us love each other apart, perhaps in heaven our souls may cling together and know no pain.

“One word more before I write the word farewell. I know now what I could not see at first, that he could never have loved me, even if he had never seen you. I have not your mental strength or your varied culture—I could never have fascinated him as you do, I could never have wakened in his heart a worship that should be a new power in his life, I could only have loved him, and that I will do until my heart, so weak and passionate now, is still for evermore.

“You may show him this—if you wish—it matters little now—I hid my secret from him when we were together, but I have left the world now, and he may think of me as if I were dead.

“When you read this I shall be far away. Think of me as tenderly as you can, and believe

always while you are happy in the love you know so well how to prize, with fair children perhaps growing up around you, that your names day and night will be breathed to heaven by me.

“Edith Ashford.”

Maud could scarcely restrain her impatience while Arthur read the letter.

“Can we not bring her back?” she said eagerly when he had finished, “we are so happy in our love, can we sit down in selfish enjoyment and let her heart break?”

“We can do nothing,” said Arthur, sadly, “we could tell her nothing she does not know, we could show her no gentleness she does not already acknowledge. Fool that I was I never dreamed of this; but it is too late now for aught but sympathy.”

Yes, it was now too late to call her back. Even Maud felt that, after a few minutes’ reflection, though it cast a shadow upon her happiness to think of Edith so sorrowful and lonely. But it

is so always in life, gladness for me means too often agony for thee, and when we rejoice that the earth has grown pleasant to our tread, the soft turf on which our heedless footsteps fall may be the grass growing on an unknown grave.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“ For love is poesie—it doth create
From fading features, dim soul, doubtful heart,
And this world’s wretched happiness, a life
Which is as near to Heaven as are the stars.”

Philip James Bailey.

THERE is great excitement prevailing in Elverley. The village lads and lasses in the glory of Sunday raiment, the farm labourers in unwonted splendour, the tradespeople from Entwich, and the gentry from many a mile around are all wending their way to the parish church, with a disregard of class distinctions that knows

no parallel but the unanimity of Yankee politicians when a bell summons them to dinner.

To the reflective mind it is obvious that something unusual is about to happen. The Reverend Ezekiel Hallett is an excellent man, but his discourses are rather too sulphureous for the month of August, and there is an eagerness expressed in the peoples' faces that cannot be explained even by the satisfaction of the well regulated Christian mind at picturing the probable perdition of others.

It is Maud's wedding-day, and what occasion could be half so sweet to them as this? Old people who remember her almost a baby, little children who associate her with sweets and caresses, boys who have worshipped her with far off chivalrous devotion, girls who have regarded her with admiring envy, they have all come forth in their best array to see the wedding of her whom they still consider the village queen.

Nature seems to think so too, for on this first

day of August there are light and beauty everywhere—in the clear blue skies, in the golden corn-fields, and on the bosom of the little river Elva. If Maud's fancy about a subtle sympathy existing between the river and herself is true, every wave is an omen of gladness to-day, for it flows laughing ever to the distant ocean, as though the sunshine upon it were a crown that would never fade away.

The sunlight streams through the windows of the old church on the expectant faces of the congregation. Old inhabitants are declaring in whispers, that the church has not been so full for fifty years.

Sir Herbert Stansfeld is there, with a rather uneasy remembrance of the day when he asked Maud to be his wife, and received such a decided refusal. He is a little wiser now, for his parliamentary life has rather humbled him. The House having been counted out during each of his first seven speeches, the possibility that he was not

an orator slowly dawned upon him, and it is confidently hoped by his friends, that he may ultimately arrive at a like conclusion, with regard to his other qualifications, and become in consequence a very respectable nonentity.

We will hope so for he is soon to be married. The young lady with the pink ribbons who is looking up in poetic abstraction at the roof, and composing an Ode to the Blue-bottle, is Miss Arabella Clare, and before three months have passed away she will be Lady Stansfeld.

But she and Sir Herbert are not alone in the pew, Miss Agnes Stansfeld is there, and beside her a young man who squints, smiles constantly, and has hair as red as a young poets description of a battle-field, he is none other than Leonard West, and they also are to be married shortly. Therefore they look round the church with a kind of professional interest in the proceedings.

Mrs. Tonkin the plump landlady of the 'Elm

Tree ' is there, looking pleasanter and brighter than ever, she is talking earnestly to a women dressed in deep mourning, who as she raises her veil reveals the features of Mrs. Thorby. There are tears in her eyes, for she has just been placing a wreath of flowers on Alfred's grave; but it is a pleasanter face than it used to be, for real sorrow has taught her to leave off whimpering over fancied grief.

There is a low hum of subdued conversation throughout the church, people of any class cannot sit still long without talking, and they have been seated some time. Some of them too have not seen Maud since she left Elverley for London, and they make repeated enquiries whether she is changed.

“ Have you seen her ? ”

“ O' course I have. She's been stayin's at the Doctor's house.”

“ Is she changed anyways ? ”

“ Not a bit on it, 'cept that she's growed more beautiful.”

“ She couldn’t well do that.”

“ Ay, but she has done ’t I tell ’ee. More womanly like she’s grow’d.”

“ A’nt it late? ”

“ Taint fur off the time. Here she comes.”

This was a false announcement, according to the invariable custom of crowds of any description expecting the arrival of anybody. It is only Clara Corrie, looking very pretty and extremely excited.

The low hum of conversation all over the church is faintly heard again.

“ Who’s goin’ to marry ’em? ”

“ Passun Hallett.”

“ Ay, times is changed since Mr. Atherton were here. He were a real gentleman, he were.”

“ ‘Deed he were that. And Miss Maud’s like him.”

“ Do ’ee know this Mr. Calverley, I see him yes’day, and he was as fine and straight a chap as ever I set eyes on. But what is he? ”

“ Oh he writes books, and they think a deal of him in Lunnon. He’s a kind spoken gentleman too, and were very good to me matter o’ three year ago.”

“ Here he comes.”

The report is true this time—Arthur and Walter Medhurst pass slowly down the crowded aisle, and take up their places in readiness for Maud and little Nellie Yempson, who is to be her only bridesmaid.

“ Who’s that gentleman, Herbert, with Mr. Calverley? ”

“ That’s Dr. Medhurst, an old school-fellow of his. Calverley looks handsome this morning, doesn’t he? And by Jove here comes the bride.”

In her simple bridal dress of white, with a single rose in her beautiful hair, leaning on the arm of Sir Harold Atherton (who is divided between admiration of the grace and beauty of his neice, and a nervous misgiving that he is out of his element and is looking absurd), Maud

passes down the aisle looking so beautiful that Arthur's are not the only eyes in church that grow brighter as she comes.

Her face is rather graven than usual, for the old church has memories that are ringing in her thoughts to-day—thoughts of her father, of her child lover's grassy grave so near her father's, of Edith Ashford in the stillness of an Italian convent, of her guardian's death and dishonour—have made her eyes fill with tears; but her face is too eloquent with love and trust for it to be sad.

The Reverend Ezekiel Hallett is not much given to admiring feminine beauty. On the contrary he regards women generally rather in the light of a nuisance, worthy of interest only to curates in the fresh bloom of their verdant youth, but even he admires the bride, and reads the marriage service with something that is faintly suggestive of feeling.

And so in the sweet old words they plight their

troth—"for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness or in health"—henceforth and for ever they are one, and Arthur's eye flashes proudly as he thinks—"Come what may she is mine own, and nothing but death can separate us."

The village children strew the aisle with flowers, and the organist, who is very nervous notwithstanding he taught Maud music, (a circumstance he has mentioned this morning exactly twenty-seven times) plays the Wedding March, while Arthur and his wife leave the church together.

But the dignity of their exit is marred somewhat by Maud's old nurse, Sarah, who has been a delighted witness of the ceremony, and now rushes forward and hugs her in the presence of everybody.

The confusion is not lessened by the golden-haired little bridesmaid, who having always associated a church with the idea of absolute

solemnity and decorum, sees something so intensely ludicrous in this that the spot becomes musical with her childish laughter. But Maud herself is too much amused to be much disconcerted, and Sarah having retired somewhat abashed after a breathless benediction, they leave the church without further mishap.

The people disperse slowly, talking in groups of the bride; how beautiful she is and how young. While she and Arthur drive back to Dr. Corrie's for the wedding breakfast.

It is a great disappointment to Mrs. Tonkin that this is not to be at the 'Elm Tree,' but Clara would not hear of it being at any other house but hers.

At the breakfast every one is more or less excited, and Sir Harold Atherton astonishes every one by blubbering audibly in his speech. He has come to the conclusion that the want of his life has been a daughter like Maud, and seems to think that he has been rather badly used in

not possessing one. The usual toasts are proposed, Dr. Corrie is very prosy and very kind and Arthur's brief manly words are much applauded. Nellie Yempson, whose pretty little head is giddy with all the petting she has received to-day, confesses to Walter Medhurst that she thinks being married is the most delightful thing in the world except music, and that she would like to be married herself.

Then the bride rises, and leaves the room with Clara Corrie to put on her travelling dress. When she returns there are the usual leave takings, and they all cluster round the carriage eager for the last word of farewell, and the last touch of her hand. At last this too is over, and Arthur and Maud have left Elverley for London en route for Switzerland.

Ah well! we rail at life, and truly it is sad enough at best, but words should not be used lightly. Say that life is sad—that there is sharp agony everywhere, and the wail of broken hearts,

that our boyish dreams have never been fulfilled—that our airy castles have crumbled into dust at the touch of Time, that there is disappointment in almost everything—say all this if you will cynic, for death itself is not more certain. But do not call the world a dreary place or life a dull routine while love is left us, for wherever the words ‘*I love thee*’ are truly uttered, whether by Clarence and Ethel in the palace, or by Tom and Sally in the attic, there is a power that can conquer pain, face all danger and trample difficulty beneath its feet.

CHAPTER XIX.

“King Lear—

We two alone will sing like birds i'the cage;
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
And ask of thee forgiveness.”

Shakespeare.

THE old stories that made our nurseries enchanted worlds, used to usher in their heroes and heroines with the words ‘once upon a time,’ and dismiss them with the comforting assurance that they lived happily ever afterwards. It was a masterly opening, freeing the narrator from all chronological fetters, enabling him to defy the accurate leaning of critics, and to group the

events of centuries together with a glorious liberty; but the end always seemed to us tame in comparison. Was it possible, we used to argue, that Jack after a life of giant-killing relapsed into obscurity like a retired pork-butcher? that Jill never did anything remarkable since the memorable day when she and her lover met with the mishap recorded in history? was it likely that the dish and the spoon, having eloped together in a moment of universal excitement, should have enjoyed a life of unruffled happiness not even disturbed by the sharp prong of an envious fork?

We refused to believe it.

Yet at the risk of being charged with inconsistency I shall bow to the general rule and part with my hero and heroine, now that they have clasped hands and uttered marriage vows. Not even with the woman whom we love does life become an easy thing, but it becomes essentially different—a new drama with new influences,

activities, pains, possibilities, and triumphs.

One incident of their married life should be recorded here for it affects my story, it will simply remain for me to indicate the final course of events in the lives that became interwoven with those of Maud or Arthur, and then, oh unknown reader, gentle or impatient, sympathetic or vindictive, you and I must part for ever.

Arthur had been married eight years, and was sitting in his library writing, when a servant came in and said that a stranger wished to see him alone on a matter of most urgent importance.

“What kind of a stranger?” said Arthur.

“A very old gentleman, sir.”

“Did he tell you his name?”

“No, sir, he said it wasn’t known to you.”

“That sounds mysterious, Arthur,” said Maud, who was sitting near him sewing, (he always declared he could never write so well as when she was in the room) “according to melodramatic rule this unknown stranger should be a cloaked

ruffian, with a concealed stiletto. But I'd better leave you alone notwithstanding."

"Show him in," said Arthur to the servant, adding to Maud when they were alone together again, "you are a heartless and unnatural wife Maud, my life is threatened with assassination according to your theory, and with boredom according to mine, but regardless of these terrible contingencies you calmly consign me to my fate."

"The great unknown wished to see you alone, Arthur."

"Then either he doesn't know what my wife is like, or else he's a fool," said Arthur, glancing lovingly at Maud's fair face.

Maud was beginning a laughing reply, when the servant ushered in the stranger.

He was a man of about sixty years of age, but looked much older. He had a very remarkable face, good features, keen blue eyes, a resolute mouth, and a forehead deeply lined by sorrow more than age. His dress was neglected and

bespattered with mud, but there was something in his manner rough and unstudied as it was, indicative of a gentleman.

“I wish to speak to you alone sir,” he said, “on a matter of a very peculiar nature.”

Maud noiselessly left the room.

“Is that your wife?” said the strange visitor.

“Yes,” Arthur replied wondering what that had to do with his visitor’s business.

“She has a sweet face,” said the old man wistfully.

Arthur assented to this proposition with a faint misgiving that his visitor was mad. “If he has only come here to talk about Maud’s face,” thought Arthur, “I shall cut the interview short. I can do that myself a great deal better than he can.” However he handed his guest a chair and waited for him to speak further.

The old man started abruptly as though he had awakened from a reverie, then he said hoarsely—

“It was no impertinent admiration sir, that

made me speak of your wife's face. I was thinking of my own daughter—my Annie. She would not have been many years older than your wife, and she was beautiful once. God knows I loved her, and yet I killed her, as surely as though I had beaten her life out with my own hand.”

There was a strange earnestness in his voice and manner that made his rugged words tragical in their intensity.

“These are strange words, Mr. Calverley,” he said, “and mine is a strange visit. I believe there is neither hope nor mercy for me in earth or in heaven, and yet I come to you for denial or confirmation of this. In your writings I have found much that has humbled and instructed me, I have been much among the poor of London and by them your name is always uttered with reverence. Will you hear my story and tell me what to do?”

“I will hear anything you wish to tell me,” said Arthur gently, “and if I can help you in any

way I will do so gladly. Counsel from a young man to one who is his elder frequently savours of impertinence, but if my rather peculiar experiences of sorrow and penitence qualify me to offer you any advice, such as it is it shall be freely yours."

The stranger thanked him gratefully, and then said in the same hurried excited manner in which he had spoken before.

"Twenty-five years ago I should have scorned any counsel. I was a Dissenting Minister—a Calvinist of the most rigid and unbending school. I had studied far more deeply than most men of my class. I had talent too—they said, truly or not matters little now—and among the people with whom I associated I was honoured and famous."

He spoke as though his past self were another man, and therefore his fame could be freely spoken of, there was not the shadow of pride or glad remembrance in his manner, only the same hurried earnestness.

“ I had a daughter whom I loved. I swear that I loved her. I swear it solemnly in the sight of God! I had not been an affectionate man. I had taught myself to believe that earthly loves were carnal and wrong and that we cheated heaven by them. I had never loved anyone but Annie, but God knows I loved her.”

It is impossible to convey any adequate idea of the passion with which he spoke.

“ She was pretty and clever, and I used to sit alone for hours picturing what she would be like when she grew to be a woman. I wished her to think as I thought, to hold the same dark doctrines, to cling to the same gloomy faith, but I wished her also to be highly educated. You will scarcely believe, holding the views I did, that I let her leave home, but I did, and what is stranger still I sent her to a country I thought cursed and lost for ever.—I sent her to France.”

Arthur uttered a word of quick surprise. He had listened attentively throughout the interview,

but the last phrase seemed to coincide strangely with his thoughts.

“ I believed her to be one of the Lord’s elect, and I thought what a triumph it would be for her to go among the devilries of France and come back unsullied, to have weighed all the frivolity of their life in her hands and found it worthless—to be highly cultured, yet never waver from the harsh faith I had taught, or shrink from the dull life I had compelled her to live. That was my dream when I let her go to France.”

Arthur listened with a strange presentiment of what the end of the story would be.

“ You see, as any man but I would have done, what was the end of that. She did come back unsullied, pure, and true as she had gone, but she had learnt a hundred tastes and accomplishments, harmless and innocent enough, but worldly and wrong to my ascetic judgment. I told her all these things were for the world not for the children of God. I forbade her all indulgencies. I made

her life a dull and miserable routine instead of the glad bright existence heaven meant it to be, and in all this I dared to believe I was serving God."

He had no pity for himself, but told the story with a fierce condemnation of his actions, that showed the old nature to be not quite extinct.

"And yet I loved her—though I made her miserable. I loved her—though I gave her no word of tenderness. I loved her—though I made her dread me like a task-master. I loved her always. The graces and accomplishments that I condemned so sternly I was secretly fond of. Often I have listened outside her bed-room to hear her sing the songs I had forbidden her even to mention in my presence."

There was a wild tenderness in his voice whenever he spoke of her, a harsh tone of anger when he spoke of himself.

"She grew weary of her home and lost all her old vivacity, if nothing had happened perhaps

her heart would have broken, and she would have been laid to rest in the little Devonshire churchyard beside her mother, that would have been bad enough to bear, but a sterner fate than that lay before my poor Annie.

“The young squire of the village came of age just then. I let Annie go to his birthday fête, seeing how she drooped and grew sadder every day. He was fascinated by her beauty. She was young and loving. You may guess the rest.”

The tears streamed down the old man's cheeks as he spoke of his daughter's shame.

“I will not curse him now for he is dead. He was drowned two years ago in boating, and his sins curse him sufficiently without my weak words. But before he seduced my child she was pure as the Angels of God.

“If I had been a different kind of father I might have won her confidence, if I had made her home happy for her it would have been a shield to keep her pure—but I had thrown away

the possibility of that ; she had no one to help or counsel her, she was little more than a child, she loved him passionately and she fell."

He broke down now for the first time, but it was only for a moment. Recovering himself by a strong effort, he continued in the same hurried excited manner.

"Not even *he* was more to blame for this than I—but I could not see that then. When she stood before me with her baby at her breast, my heart yearned to comfort and forgive her. But I thought this tenderness a sin. I said she had disgraced her name for ever, that she had incurred the wrath of God and man, and with a bigot's curse I sent her into the streets to die."

"Is that the whole of your story?" said Arthur, for he paused as though his confession were ended.

"There is very little more. When she had gone I flung myself on the ground and sobbed like a woman ; for days I was ill and unconscious. When I recovered I longed to undo what I had

done. But it was too late, I was still too proud to own that I had erred, and so for years I lived a childless, friendless, miserable old man.

“At last I threw the paltry disguise away. I gave up my church and devoted every energy I possessed to find my child and bring her back to the home from which I had driven her. I have sought her for years with no end but disappointment. But a week ago I heard that she was dead, and that you stood by her bed the day she died. I have come to you to ask if there is any forgiveness for me on earth or in heaven.”

“Do you wish to conceal your name?” said Arthur.

“My name is John Yempson.”

Arthur was not unprepared to hear this, for a suspicion of the truth had already suggested itself to him. He rose and took the old man's hand in his before replying, then he said—

“It is quite true that I stood beside your daughter's death-bed. I remember her very well.

She had suffered much, and died in extreme poverty ; but no word of reproach fell from her lips, and her rest now is the holy rest of heaven."

John Yempson gave one low moan of utter despair.

"You are weary and excited," said Arthur, "let me prevail on you to lie down on the sofa here and try to sleep. In the mean time I will prepare any information for you that I possess concerning your daughter."

The old man complied apparently more with a view of submission to kindness than with any desire of his own for rest. Leaving him so, Arthur went out of the room to carry out a plan that had suggested itself to him.

He told Maud who John Yempson was, and what was the object of his visit. She listened eagerly and said when he had finished—

"I know what you are thinking, Arthur, and it is my thought too. If Nellie were here she would seem, in her fresh young beauty, his

daughter come back to him, and all the wild past would seem like a troubled dream."

"Yes, darling, that is what I felt at once."

Nellie Yempson, no longer a child but a pretty girl of seventeen, was at boarding school.

"I will go at once," said Maud, "and fetch her."

"Do," said Arthur, "I would rather that she learnt the story of her birth from your lips than from mine. Tell her the stern Calvinist who drove her mother from his house exists no longer; but in his stead an old man, broken-hearted and despairing, who will die unless she stretches out her hand to save him. Tell her all this, darling, and bring her here quickly."

Maud started at once for the school; it was not very far distant, but the hour of absence seemed to Arthur as though it would never end.

At last he heard Maud's welcome knock, she had returned with Nellie, and Arthur saw at a glance she had told her all.

Nellie ran up to him in her affectionate girlish way, and threw her arms round his neck.

“ Dear Mr. Arthur,” she sobbed. “ Let me go to him at once. Let me try to comfort him as my mother would have done. Let me tell him that he has not only forgiveness—but love.”

“ Wait a few minutes longer, Nellie,” said Arthur, “ I must prepare him for this, or the shock will be too great.”

Leaving the excited girl in Maud's care. Arthur entered the library once more. John Yempson had risen from the sofa and was moodily pacing up and down the room.

“ I cannot rest,” he said wearily, “ there is no rest for me anywhere except the grave.”

“ I have come back to speak to you, Mr. Yempson,” said Arthur, “ to tell you what I know, and if I can to help you.”

“ You cannot help me. I have sinned too deeply. Heaven and Heaven's pity are not for such as I.”

“Heaven’s pity is for all who ask it humbly,” Arthur replied, “and your need is great. Your sin of long ago that has brought such bitter sorrow on your head, was not want of tenderness for you loved your daughter truly, but disbelief in the forgiving love of God. Will you repeat that now and curse yourself as you cursed your child?”

“I cannot believe there is forgiveness for me,” said John Yempson, despairingly. “I should believe it if my child came back from the grave and gave me hers, but now ——”

“Would you believe it then?” said Arthur, “if she came back as she was when she died, worn with poverty, prematurely aged by anxiety, shame, and the daily struggle with death, I think you would read such an epic of suffering in her pale face, that Divine forgiveness would appear impossible.”

The old man gave no answer but the same low moan of agony he had uttered before.

“ But suppose,” said Arthur, “ that God heard your prayer and restored her to you, not as I knew her, worn and sad, but in the bloom of her youth and beauty, with no shadow of sadness on her face and no stain of shame upon her soul. Would you believe then that God had forgiven you ? ”

“ Yes,” said John Yempson, piteously, “ *I would believe it then.* ”

“ Then listen to what I have to tell you,” said Arthur, “ the child that lay upon your daughter’s breast the day you saw her last, the child whom she loved better than anything else in the world, whose baby fingers held her back from degradation and death, did not die. When her mother died I promised to try and be to her the father she had lost, under my care she has grown to be almost a woman, and now — ”

“ Is here,” cried Nellie, unable any longer to restrain her impatience, running into the room and throwing herself at the old man’s feet. “ Is

here to give you a daughter's love and care, to prove to you that God who has taken my mother to Himself has pardon, pity, and love for us all."

The old man looked at the beautiful young girl before him, so like his daughter in her brightest days, as though she were a figure in a dream who would disappear with the light of day.

"Do not repulse me," said Nellie, clinging to him, "let us forget the past and only remember how you loved my mother when she was a child. Let me try to be to you what she was—for I vow in the sight of Heaven that only death shall separate us."

John Yempson realised the truth now.

"Oh God," he cried, "whose love I have doubted, and for whose forgiveness I have not dared to pray, since Thou hast brought my daughter's child after long weariness and agony back to me, I will believe there is hope in life—even for me."

He laid his gray head upon Nellie's bosom and

wept like a child awakening from a dream of pain. With her words and her caresses she soothed and comforted him, though her own tears were falling fast.

“ Let us go, Maud,” whispered Arthur, “ it is better they should be alone together.”

So Maud and Arthur quietly left the room, and John Yempson feeling Nellie’s young heart beating so lovingly against his own, learnt as many a man has learnt before, the reality of Heaven from the light touch of a woman’s hand.

CHAPTER XX.

Silent and pitiless, the stream of time
Flows onward ever to the unknown sea.
While weak things die, hearts break, and roses fade,
But love remains for evermore the same.

THREE more years have passed away.

There is little change in the appearance of Elverley. The old church is a thing of centuries not of years, the little river Elva has learnt the secret of eternal youth, and though the wild flowers die or are trampled under foot like human hopes and dreams, unlike them they bloom again in fresher beauty than before.

But the inmates of the little village. Has no change visited them?

Yes—a change has come over the theology of the Reverend Ezekiel Hallett. He is still sternly orthodox in view, and sulphureous in discourse, but he was heard to remark in the course of his last sermon that he regarded the salvation of a High Churchman or a Dissenter as an event that under exceptional circumstances might possibly happen! Well might Miss Gloffoggen shake her head grimly and mourn over the laxity of doctrine, even among the church's staunchest champions.

Miss Gloffoggen has never married. She lives with her cousin, Mrs. Arvale, in a large red-brick house, which visitors commonly mistake for a lunatic asylum. 'She has largely interested herself,' to quote the words of the *Entwich Gazette*, 'in the high cause of the rights of women,' and in this Mrs. Arvale, (a resigned widow, improved neither in appearance nor in temper) has rendered her valuable assistance.

Miss Gloffoggen has not confined herself to private discussion on this great subject. She has delivered lectures to large audiences to the eternal glory of womanhood. Happening to be in Elverley a month ago, I went to the Entwich Town Hall to hear her. She ascribed all the misfortunes of history, including the fall of our first parents, and the eruptions of Mount Vesuvius to the fact of women not being allowed to vote, and brandished her umbrella in vindictive violence at imaginary women, whom she pictured as forgetting their high vocation for the sake of sentiment. I noticed that the masculine portion of her audience turned very pale, and a young curate with a meek expression, a nervous manner, and a faultless cravat, who sat next me, showed alarming symptoms of fainting away. But as I walked back to Elverley I observed in a winding path shaded by old trees, a manly looking young farmer and a very pretty village girl.

As they had been to hear Miss Gloffoggen's

lecture, they might have been expected to walk very far apart, and to discuss political economy. But the young farmer utterly unmindful of what he had heard that evening, and fancying he had no witness but the moonlight, stopped more than once to kiss the pretty girl. It was a highly ridiculous action of course, seeing that no pecuniary benefit could be derived from it. But I noticed with some relief after what I had been told by the maiden orator about womanhood, that the village girl, who had dark eyes and very tempting lips, appeared by no means averse to these caresses. It occurred to me then that after all there might be a little too much power in this contemptible 'sentiment' for it to be strangled by bony hands, or brandished away by alpaca umbrellas.

Mrs. Tonkin is still landlady of the 'Elm Tree,' the twelve years that have passed away since Maud's wedding-day seem to have touched her very gently, and she is plumper and more

good-natured than ever. Mrs. Thorby lives with her now, a woman who is always grave but never querulous, though her eyes will fill with tears at any allusion to her son Alfred, whose little grave in the churchyard is always bright with flowers.

Visitors often notice the beauty of the roses growing there, and no spot in the churchyard is more often visited, for it lies in the shadow of a marble cross that marks the grave of Ralph Atherton.

There is a stately tomb near it, a triumph of the sculptor's art. The garrulous old sexton will tell you its story. How she was the wife of a rich man in London, who broke her heart it was whispered, how she was ordered country air by the doctors, and came down to Elverley where she gradually grew weaker till she died. And he will tell you that she was young and wonderfully beautiful—that she loved to watch the village children playing—that she was always kind and gentle to the poorest of them, and the old man

will shake his head sagely as though he knew more than he cared to tell.

The name graven on the monument is that of Lady Kate Glendale.

Clara Corrie could fill in the outlines of the old sexton's story, for in her last illness Lady Glendale told her all. "When I am dead let this ring still lie upon my breast," she whispered, "and be buried with me;" and when her broken heart weary of life had ceased to beat, the diamonds lay still upon her bosom in the grave.

Sir Thomas Glendale is richer and more courted than ever. Though he is an old man now, match-making mothers smile constantly upon him, and wealth-loving daughters do not always frown. But he has never married again.

He lives in great style, and is much visited by people for whom he cares nothing, yet strange to say he is always irritable and complaining. If any one told him that this was the inevitable end of a life like his, that money-making is not the

sublimest possibility of manhood, and that even his soul has requirements which wealth is powerless to satisfy—he would doubtless be greatly astonished, but as no one ever does suggest such a solution to the mystery of his unhappiness, the idea is not likely to occur to him.

Clara Corrie has never wavered in her love and admiration for Maud, she writes her regularly long letters, telling in minute detail every event that transpires in Elverley, though her time is generally occupied in looking after her six children, who are the most mischievous little urchins in Elverley.

Arabella Clare renounced sentiment a month after her wedding-day, and took to cooking instead. This being a great deal more suited to Sir Herbert Stansfeld's tastes, their married life has been an exceedingly pleasant hum-dum affair. Sir Herbert has never done anything remarkable either in parliament or out of it, but he is far less self-conceited than he used to be, and much more

bearable in consequence. His sister, Mrs. Leonard West, is a frequent visitor at the Hall. She has left off boring humanity by remarks about her husband, but the subject of her children is a more fruitful theme than the old one. It is computed that more people have yawned over the accomplishments of her large family than have ever attended Miss Gloffoggen's lectures. It is a social calamity when they first begin to talk, both she and her husband are so loquacious concerning the event, and when their first three infants were teething, they used to post an announcement of every fresh tooth that was cut, outside the gates of their house, like an official bulletin.

Nellie Yempson kept her vow. From the day when she first laid her grandfather's head upon her bosom to the hour when the old man died she gave him more than a daughter's tenderness and care. She is married now to a rising barrister, who is very proud of his pretty young wife; but her veneration for Arthur is profound

as ever, and she will never let him call her anything but 'Raven' still. It seems an absurd misnomer for a golden-haired young lady, but she has never forgotten the day when he bestowed it upon her first, or the quaint child who enquired for Abel Alley and avowed her preference for hard-bake to anything else the world contained.

In the poorest streets of Rome the Sisters of Charity pass ever on their unwearied way. There is one among them whose voice is sweeter, whose touch is gentler, and whose face is more beautiful than all the rest. Wherever there is danger to be braved or suffering to be endured she is to be found, and her name has often been the last word uttered by dying lips. In the convent that is her home no ones knows her story; but outside its walls it has been whispered more than once that she is Edith Ashford, who twelve years ago was the most beautiful actress in London. Few would recognize in the calm serene woman the passionate girl of long ago; but she has not

forgotten the past, and whenever she kneels in prayer she murmurs the names of Maud and Arthur.

Ernest Cradley and his wife are living at Norwood, not far from Arthur's house which they frequently visit. Ernest Cradley has never grown very rich or very famous, but he has a sweet little wife and a group of happy children. Few men are happier, for his life has but one shadow to dim its brightness.

It is the constant dread of a visit from his mother-in-law.

Mr. Scrodge, the novelist who remonstrated with Arthur on his review of his book, is now a popular author. His greatest works—'Stabbed to the Heart, or the Mangled Madman of Mugglesby Meads,' 'The Avenging Hand,' and 'The Heroine of Crime' have been read by thousands. He takes all praise as his simple due, and is more convinced than ever that nothing in life is worth writing about but crime. He is writing a new

book now : its title is not known, but as it comprises murder, bigamy, seduction, forgery, and several other crimes not commonly mentioned (though eagerly read about) in polite society, there is little doubt it will establish his fame for ever.

Arthur has won fame too of a very different kind. The world is slow to recognise wealth of soul or intellect; but when it does yield its homage to one worthy of worship it yields it freely and for ever. As an author of brilliant and varied powers, as a critic with delicate perceptions and high ideals, as a man who sees clearly the requirements of the people and the exigencies of the age, Arthur Calverley is revered and honoured. But his life has richer achievements even than this. To the cause of the poor, not in blind partisanship but in thoughtful sympathy, the noblest efforts of his life are given. Only those who have learnt what history means can realize what work like Arthur's effects for

society. Not only does it minister to the poor and comfort the sorrowful, but it saves the higher classes from calamities of which they little dream, and it curbs passions that have shattered society before and may convulse it with terror and agony again.

The extent of Arthur's work is little recognised ; yet people often marvel at his untiring energy and intellectual vigour. To all such expressions of wonder he replies that he possesses a talisman of mystic power that has never failed him in the direst need. But the name of the talisman is known to few.

Walter Medhurst and Charlie Alcester know it for they are his most intimate friends. There has grown up a fantastic affection between these two so unlike in thought, taste and disposition. It may be their common friendship for Arthur, it may be the remembrance cherished in the secret soul of both, of a woman loved tenderly in the dead past, but whatever may be the cause their

friendship is no ordinary attachment. At Arthur's house in Norwood, on summer evenings in the conservatory, or on winter nights beside the blazing fire, Arthur and Maud, Walter Medhurst, and Charles Alcester often meet and talk together; of old times and coming events, of subjects sad as death and themes glad and hopeful, sometimes with earnest thought, sometimes with exquisite nonsense, these conversations treat.

And in these evenings, and while listening to Maud's sweet voice or her light touch on the piano's keys, Arthur's friends have learnt the secret of his power—they know that a woman's love first nerved him to heroism, and a woman's hand has led him on to high achievements and to noble deeds.

Twelve years have not marred the freshness of Maud's beauty or altered, save to intensify, the charm of her thousand ways of winning grace.

In her home, musical with childish laughter and the tread of little feet, Maud reigns a queen

—submissive to her husband yet inspiring him ever, never attempting to wrest from him the rule which is his right, yet guiding him by her womanly influence, and gladdening his life by her beauty and her love. As a wife, a mother, and a friend she is a queen to whom disloyalty is impossible.

May God bless thee dear Maud, and make this rough world pleasant to thy tread. May no year be so heavy with sadness for thee as to dim the gladness of thy pure heart or the sunshine of thy happy smile.

Of all our atheisms in an atheistic age there is none drearier than our atheism in womanhood.

We measure the gigantic power of mechanism, and we talk learnedly about the forces of Nature, but few have learnt the wondrous influence of a woman's love, or grasped the truth that the light touch of a small white hand is often mightier than the force of artillery or the power of steel.

But hearts like Maud Atherton's are not a

dream. Women there are who will be young and beautiful always, though their bright eyes grow dim, and their luxuriant tresses grey. Women who are rich in the fairest gifts of heaven—whose faces are fair, whose voices are sweet, whose minds are brilliant and cultured, and whose hearts are pure and true.

He who has never known such a woman is poor though he wore a royal diadem, he who has known and loved such an one, whatever his surroundings, is rich. Such women make this sad weary life, a beautiful and hopeful thing. The world can yield nothing so well worth winning as their love, for in the strength awakened by their trust, the greatest difficulty can be surmounted, and in the strength inspired by their sympathy the heaviest sorrow can be borne.

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